

## Mencap Case Study

### What is Wheels for All's Bike Buddy programme?

We regularly supported about up to 20 members of Liverpool & Sefton Mencap with a range of cycling experiences, under Wheels for All's Bike Buddy programme. Bike Buddy is a companion cycling scheme to enable anyone who wishes to ride a bike, for the first time, or after a long time, and anywhere in between, can do so in the company of an experienced, friendly DBS-ed buddy.

Our Bike Buddy riders had a range of experiences that included:

- riding for the first time
- riding independently (not in tandem)
- riding on a weekly basis in 2 very different settings
- progressing from 3 wheels onto 2 wheels
- riding a bike for the first time in over 40 years
- instilling road sense into an active, but 'careless' rider
- identifying cycle routes to places of interest
- upskilling Mencap volunteers to embed a positive culture in the organisation
- planning group rides to teach ride etiquette, positioning, communication & setting pace
- learning to change an inner tube and basic bike maintenance

### What happened?

Bike Buddy, through Liverpool & Sefton Mencap, began during the pandemic. Lockdown and limited social contact rules meant we had to find creative ways to engage with our participants, as we couldn't meet face to face.

We began with Zoom calls to introduce ourselves and demonstrated the types of cycles we would have for the project. This was important because it established trust and built relationships in preparation for the time when we could meet as a group. In late April/early May 2021, we hosted three try-out days in different locations to encourage participation and to gain an understanding of what the need was. This, and regular group rides, enabled us to assess individual ability and to plan a progression pathway for those that wanted or were able to increase or improve their ability. In early summer 2021, we followed these taster days with regular, weekly group sessions at Croxteth Hall Park and Litherland Sports Park, on a dedicated cycle infrastructure. These group sessions, using a mixture of inclusive and 2-wheel cycles were fun, informally structured but always with a purpose: to build confidence, stamina, and excitement about cycling. Progression towards independent cycling was gradually developed, with longer rides, rides on quieter roads and along the prom, giving the opportunity to finetune navigational skills and general etiquette.

### Introduction

At the time of the project (Autumn 2021), there was a real and urgent need because of the Covid-19 global pandemic, to encourage specific groups of people, including those with learning disabilities, to rediscover the joys of being outside, on a bike and enjoying all the health and mental health benefits associated with cycling. People with learning disabilities often have a number of different health conditions and Covid-19 would have made them clinically vulnerable. Consequently they would have missed out on even permitted wider social contact and this was having a detrimental effect, not only on their physical health, but on their mental health and wellbeing.

### Who were the partners?

The partners were Sport England via their local partner, MSP, for a project Liverpool & Sefton Mencap wanted to deliver. This was a direct response to the transport challenges caused by the pandemic to their client base, who are people with learning disabilities, in a high-risk category because of Covid-19. Instead of public transport, Liverpool & Sefton Mencap wanted to provide an active travel, alternative transport option instead.

### What support did they need?

Liverpool & Sefton Mencap were seeking a local partner to support 20 individuals with learning disabilities, who needed alternative active transport options that felt safer than public transport during the pandemic.



## What was the impact?

Two young people rode on single bikes for the first time; they had only ever ridden in tandem previously. Ten of the group were now regularly cycling and looking forward to it (two were already cycling when they started with us). One of the volunteers cycled for the first time in over 40 years. We got him started on a trike to learn handling skills and become confident in stopping/starting and then moved him onto a two-wheel bike by removing the pedals and finding his 'core' to balance. His sheer determination and pride at achieving this life-long goal was incredible. We have made an existing cyclist a safe cyclist. We have given an existing cyclist the skills and the courage/confidence to cycle in his local area. We have awakened a love of all things 'bikes' in another who is now undertaking a course with a CIC in building and repairing bikes.

The organisation has put in cycle parking and has opened a community café at their hub. Since the autumn of 2021, Wheels for All has run sessions with the group on maintenance, route planning and risk assessing for cycling activity, upskilling their staff and volunteers on continuing this programme longer term. Through leading rides to nearby locations with the group, we have brought in some road cycling experience to try to encourage the group to make and carry out safe and timely decisions themselves. I believe that Liverpool & Sefton Mencap is close to having a self-sustaining inclusive cycling programme.

To take this forward further we recommended that Liverpool & Sefton Mencap should/could:

1. Appoint a cycling officer within Liverpool & Sefton Mencap, who would be the go-to contact for all cyclists (inclusive and 2-wheel) within the organisation
2. Hold discussions with existing participants and assign each a cycling 'buddy' to accompany groups and individuals on rides
3. Consider extending loan period for cycles, and determine if additional cycles/ equipment should be purchased specifically for this programme, including inclusive cycles
4. Consider an alternative, secure storage area should be set up in the grounds of Mencap Cottage, Crosby
5. Take up the formal Bike Buddy training offer from Wheels for All

## What kind of development potential does this project offer?

Should further funding be available, we could roll out further support to extend the offer to more reluctant members. We would train up 'buddies' from the existing cohort to partner new members and build a more robust scheme. We could also ensure that any new co-ordinator gets the appropriate level of support to build capacity in the organisation and to train more of their own volunteers.

Nancy Waine says, "I have loved working on this project. To see the enjoyment and the eager participation from the users has been reward in itself and we have had personal as well as group achievements. Working with Liverpool & Sefton Mencap on this project has been exciting, challenging and rewarding, for everyone involved, both Wheels for All staff and our volunteers. Our charity is grateful for the opportunity to run and develop this programme with Mencap staff and participants".

Nadine Jones, Progression Co-ordinator Mencap Liverpool & Sefton, said, "Providing an alternate mode of transport during the pandemic was vital for the continued attendance at Mencap sessions by our members. Bike Buddy enabled us to bring a new opportunity to improve cycling skills to encourage our members to make short journeys on a bike or trike. Seeing the impact, progress and enjoyment cycling has had on the group encouraged us to focus on year-round cycle-related activities, including group rides at Wheels for All".