



One Year of Wheels for All Kingston-Upon-Thames

[November 2023]



**Wheels
for All**

Celebrating A Year of Wheels for All Kingston

Wow, Wheels for All Kingston has had an incredible year! We caught up with its Coordinator, Simon Denton, who revealed inspiring highlights, significant achievements, challenges faced along the way, and what's next for the busy centre.

Rapid Growth and High Demand

Wheels for All Kingston opened in August 2022 with an official launch in October. From the very beginning, the demand for this services was evident.

"When I first started, it was all about seeing how many sessions we could get booked out on a Monday, with an initial target of three. However we had five bookings for full sessions immediately! We've got three daycare centres, one school and one college all booked on a Monday. There are also up to 10 individuals who come along regularly."

Within just six months, the centre had expanded to running sessions on Wednesday afternoons too. Regular visitors have kept them fully booked ever since. "Since term started again in September, we've had back-to-back bookings. Every bike is out; we've been really busy."

Come Rain or Shine

One of the key highlights of the year was the centre's involvement in summer outreach events, including two Disability Sports Days with Fulham Football Club and supporting Kingston Council's Staff Sports Day.

Simon said, "It poured with rain at the Fulham FC Disability Sports Day in the summer where we were offering one of the only outdoor activities. We got completely soaked but had some really good conversations with people who didn't know Wheels for All existed and were totally blown away by the services we provide."

"We definitely made an impression on them because they told us they have tickets for wheelchair users, so if any of our wheelchair users haven't been to a football match before, they're offering them tickets as a thank you for our support."

New Volunteers and a Sessional Lead

At the heart of Wheels for All Kingston's success story lies a dedicated team of volunteers who have played an instrumental role in the centre's growth and impact. It currently has a total of 10 volunteers including four regulars, three of whom help at both the Monday and Wednesday sessions. One of the centre's original volunteers has been trained as a sessional lead and completed a first aid course to be able to run sessions in Simon's absence. He also helps with training new volunteers and integrating them into the team.

Simon said, "It's great to see his progress and how much he enjoys it. He comes twice a week and wants to be part of the whole experience. And I had a week's holiday for the first time since I joined!"



Fantastic Feedback

“The feedback is great from different groups and we have built an ongoing rapport with participants. Our school group are mostly non-verbal but you can see the enjoyment on their faces, and the daycare centres like to have banter with our team. They call out our names when they arrive and say things like, ‘Can’t wait to see you next week, how many laps should I aim for?’ as they leave. It’s lovely to be such a massive part of their week.”

Overcoming Challenges

Of course, with success can come challenges.

Simon acknowledged that during quieter times, such as school holidays, it can be tough to keep the momentum going. “Volunteers don’t want to be standing around, there’s only so many times you can be checking tyres!”

However, he has built a fantastic relationship with his volunteers, whereby they support each other, not just as colleagues but as friends.

“It’s important to get to know people individually and discover what their strengths are and where they may need additional support. When the busy times come, we help each other – there’s a natural team spirit.”

Being Adaptable – “How about this until that’s ready?”

Simon shared an anecdote about three people arriving a bit early for their session, coinciding with a large group from a daycare centre. They had specific cycles in mind that they wanted to ride, but those cycles were already in use out on the track, so Simon’s team encouraged them to try something else.

As Simon puts it, “Sometimes it’s a case of saying, ‘How about this until that’s ready?’”

This is exactly what happened: two friends tried cycling together on a side-by-side trike, but only because their preferred cycles weren’t available. Off they went, and they did three laps around the track! This allowed them to have a chat as they went around and planned their activities for the week, showcasing the great social opportunities that Wheels for All provides.

While some participants are limited to particular cycles, flexibility is key. “Sometimes people might just be nervous to try something new.” The team’s approach is to instill confidence and provide encouragement, fostering an environment where everyone can feel comfortable exploring new possibilities.

Situations like these offer a great learning experience and a chance for volunteers to see how different challenges are handled.

As Simon says, “Adapting to varying needs keeps it fresh for me every week.”



Sum Up the Year in Three Words

“Exciting. Rewarding. Adaptability.”

For Simon and his team, every day is a learning curve with new challenges, including this one ... "Wheels for All Kingston is at the bottom of the M25. A man from Watford, at the top of the M25, contacted us. He had lost nerve function in one leg and was determined to get his own trike. He had contacted a few places but we were the only ones who responded. Our welcoming and helpful response encouraged him to make the long journey to us."

After spending around an hour chatting to everyone and trying four out of five trikes in the fleet, he found the right trike for him. "It was actually the one we had initially suggested, so that was a good feeling – that we know what we're talking about!"

Simon's passion and love for his job is clear. "It doesn't always feel like work – it's really fun but it's my job. I never thought I'd go to work on Monday morning with a smile on my face, but I do."

Simon's Proudest Moment

"When we started doing Wednesdays, it was because Mondays were completely booked. Now, in term time, both sessions on Wednesday afternoon are also getting fully booked, so it's hard to fit people in."

"It's a nice problem to have! It shows how much the service is needed and the support for it in the community."

Looking Ahead

- Due to popularity, Simon would love to expand sessions to include Wednesday mornings.
- By providing additional training and support, he would like to help new volunteers to become more established, including those who don't have a cycling background.
- Wheels for All Kingston works with Kingston Council and Kingston Association for the Blind (KAB) to offer tandem riding for the visually impaired. The new CEO of KAB is keen to promote the programme further, so they are hoping to have a big launch during the school holidays.
- Simon aims to partner with more local cycling clubs to offer participants the opportunity to develop their skills, including riding on the road and other advanced cycling activities.

"In the longer term, we are exploring the possibility of collaborating with another charity in Kingston, perhaps next summer, to organise a joint fundraising event involving riding at the track."

While these plans are in their very early stages, they hold great potential for expanding the centre's reach and impact.

Watch this space!



What a great year

As Wheels for All Kingston looks back on a remarkable year, it's evident that the team's dedication to inclusivity, adaptability and community has made a profound impact on the lives of participants and volunteers alike. With exciting goals for the future, the centre continues to pedal forward, transforming lives and fostering a sense of belonging in the Kingston community. If you're interested in finding out more about Wheels for All Kingston, contact Simon Denton by calling 07736 974539 or emailing simon.denton@wheelsforall.org.uk.





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