



# IMPACT REPORT

2022-23

Getting Refugees Cycling

THE  PROJECT

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connect

BRAVE

EXCITE

FUN

HAPPY

LOVE

MUSIC

LIQUEUR

Heart

HELPFUL

HAFFER

HAVEN

SHIN SEKAI

THE GO PROJECT

THE GO PROJECT

# 1. INTRODUCTION AND FOREWORDS

This report documents the main activities of The Bike Project, the successes and challenges we have encountered along the way and the impact we have had on the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. In early 2023 we took the decision to change our financial year end, and therefore this report covers a fifteen-month period from 1 January 2022 – 31 March 2023, in line with our financial reporting.

All references to asylum support used were correct for the reporting period, but these may have changed between then and report publication.

## FOREWORD FROM OUR CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

“The past fifteen months have represented a period of change and transition for The Bike Project and one in which we both faced challenges and achieved a great deal.

After a decade of visionary leadership, hard work and commitment, Jem Stein, our Founder CEO took the decision to pass the baton to a new Chief Executive. We were delighted to welcome Lizzie Kenyon in January 2023, bringing with her over seventeen years of charity sector leadership experience. Lizzie got straight to work further developing The Bike Project to ensure it can deliver for the next ten years. We are deeply grateful to Jem for his leadership and unwavering efforts to shape and grow The Bike Project into the fantastic organisation we see today.

In early 2023, we faced some significant financial challenges which were the cumulative effect of several factors including the extremely challenging fundraising environment, staggering rises in costs, huge demand for our services and having to manage a number of gaps in our own senior management team over several months. Working together in close partnership, the Board and senior team navigated through the implementation of strict controls, launched an urgent fundraising campaign and completed a full operational review and restructure. We drew enormous strength and encouragement from the hugely

generous help we were able to mobilise in a few short weeks from both new and existing supporters, and I am delighted to report that we succeeded in putting the charity back on firm foundations.

In spite of the challenges we faced, over the past fifteen months we have been able to offer support to more people than ever before and I am proud to share our achievements and the stories of some of our bike recipients in this report. We have emerged from a difficult period stronger and heartened by the depth of support and affection we have seen for The Bike Project in our mission to offer the simple but powerful intervention a bike represents to refugees and people seeking asylum.

The Bike Project celebrates its 10th anniversary in 2023. We are deeply grateful for the dedication of our team, our founder CEO Jem, our staff and volunteers, the generosity of our donors, funders and the support of our community partners who have all played a pivotal role in our achievements to date. We look forward to our next ten years with hope for a better future for those coming to the UK fleeing persecution and war.”

### DOUG KRIKLER Chair of Trustees





## FOREWORD FROM OUR CHIEF EXECUTIVE

“I am delighted to have become part of the remarkable team at The Bike Project. I have used a bicycle to get around London for the past fifteen years, the last four with my young family. I understand the transformative effect a bike can have – cycling gives you freedom, a sense of independence and the chance to connect deeply with the place you live. I joined The Bike Project because I’m passionate about giving these same outcomes and opportunities to those who seek refuge here in the UK.

At a time when refugees and people seeking asylum face hostility and violence, when we see the profound effects of a changing climate and a groundswell of interest in active travel as a means to tackle the crisis of air pollution in our towns and cities – The Bike Project offers a simple, practical solution which achieves outcomes for people and planet. I am proud to have taken over from Jem, our founder, who has worked tirelessly over the past ten years to grow The Bike Project into the wonderful organisation I now have the pleasure of leading.

Outlined in this report are the things we’ve been able to achieve, not just in the past fifteen months, but over the past ten years. Whilst, like many others in the sector, The Bike Project has faced challenges, we have worked hard to continue to deliver vital, and in many cases,

life-changing support to people who need it the most. This report clearly evidences the impacts that our work has – a donated bike is a tool to tackle poverty, loneliness, isolation and ill mental health to name but a few. The stories and quotes from our bike recipients are powerful testaments to this.

We have been overwhelmed this year by the strength of support we have received from not only those who already know us, but many who are new to our work. We are grateful to each and every person who has given care, expertise, time and resource to assist us – all of whom have played a part in delivering the impacts outlined in this report. I look forward to working with the team to further strengthen our organisation and enable many more to benefit from our work.”

### LIZZIE KENYON Chief Executive









# 2. ABOUT US

*“The Bike Project provides the first step into normal living for those who have faced persecution and atrocity.”*

**Helen Bamber OBE**

## **Getting refugees cycling**

Founded in 2013, The Bike Project provides an innovative solution to some of the most pressing and hidden issues facing refugees and people seeking asylum who are new to the UK.

Our mission is simple: each year we match refugees and people seeking asylum without the means or money to get around with the many thousands of bikes that go abandoned and unwanted, that we have lovingly refurbished. We then support these new bike owners to realise the financial, emotional, practical and physical benefits of cycling.

To date, we have refurbished and donated 11,348 bikes and developed a comprehensive programme of support to help overcome the many barriers to cycling that have been identified by refugees and people seeking asylum. Alongside these activities we have created a social enterprise selling secondhand bikes nationwide, the proceeds of which help fund our charitable activities.

## Why we do it

Having fled persecution and war, most people seeking asylum in the UK are banned from working and instead receive cash allowances. In 2022 this was capped at £40.85 per week, and those in boarded accommodation received just £8 (UK Gov, 2022). Claiming asylum is a hostile process that can take years to resolve, leaving people destitute and vulnerable without the means to meet their basic living needs. For people who do have the right to work, or receive leave to remain, there are further challenges to establishing a life here.

There are an estimated 231,597 people living in these circumstances in the UK (UNHCR, 2022), whilst at the same time there could be as many as 38 million unused bikes in the UK (Bike Club, 2021) and 27,500 bikes are abandoned each year in London alone (TfL, 2007). We believe that matching the two can provide immediate financial relief and practical benefits.

We also believe that bike ownership is a powerful tool for empowerment, providing refugees and people seeking asylum with the freedom and independence to get to know new areas and communities, improve their mental and physical health and improve their access to support, education and employment.

## How we do it

Our bike donation programme relies on collecting abandoned and unwanted bikes from the generous public through a network of volunteer-led drop-off points. The bikes are then transported to one of our workshops where they can be refurbished. No bike is wasted, if it cannot be repaired, we will break it down for spare parts or get the value of scrap metal.

We offer wide-ranging support. Everyone who receives a bike will benefit from an introduction to safe road cycling, using resources that we have tailored to the needs of people who are new to the UK. Bikes are collected from our workshop, a space that people know that they can return to for repairs, maintenance or to volunteer in the future. In addition, we provide essential cycle safety gear, tools, assist in journey planning, give preventative maintenance tips and demonstrate how to lock a bike securely before it is taken home.

*“When you have to go from charity to charity to feed yourself, a bike becomes very important to your life.”*

**Adam**

Bike Recipient

We have developed tailored programmes that support people on their journey to become confident cyclists. For some people, the single intervention of a bike may be enough, for others it is just the start of their relationship with us:

- **Bike Donations:** Through a referral process people join a waiting list and are invited to a bike fitting appointment and collect accessories from a workshop or roadshow location.
- **Repair or Replace:** Every bike we issue comes with the reassurance of a lifetime guarantee that we will maintain, repair or replace broken bikes to ensure that people can keep cycling for as long needed.
- **Pedal Power:** Cycle training is available for all women, many of whom have never ridden a bike before. Step-through bikes are fitted with custom saddles and training is delivered in a safe, supportive and empowering women-only environment.
- **Bike Buddies:** We match bike recipients with volunteer cyclists who will meet-up multiple times to help reduce isolation, support social integration, and build up cycle confidence.
- **Volunteering:** We provide the space and create opportunities for people to lend their skills, time and experience whilst feeling a valued part of a community as they help deliver our work.

## Experts through experience

This year marks the 10th anniversary of The Bike Project. Throughout the last decade, we have created and refined what we believe is a sustainable model of reuse that achieves positive outcomes for refugees and people seeking asylum - one of the UK's most diverse, disadvantaged and marginalised groups.

Whilst we have pursued growth in scale and impact, we have ensured our core activities meet the changing needs of the communities that we support. We are a close-knit team of 27 staff with unique skills and experience, who are passionate about getting refugees cycling. We operate out of London and Birmingham hubs and from there can support refugees from across the UK.

*“The Bike Project is doing something practical for refugees. We need something practical. The Bike Project has a totally different approach. I really love it.”*

**Sadaf**

Bike Recipient and Pedal Power Graduate



## Values Statement:

### We are The Bike Project and we are...

1. Building Community
2. Pioneering
3. Empowering
4. Actively Inclusive
5. Working with Integrity
6. Having Fun



We would not have got to where we are today without direct involvement from refugees and people seeking asylum who through their experience help ensure that we are meeting the precise needs of the communities that we aim to support.

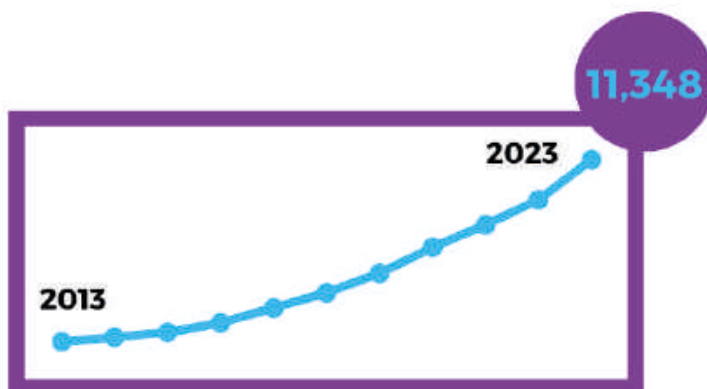
Two of our current board members are themselves refugees with direct personal experience of our services and they enrich our strategic leadership with their knowledge and skills. Volunteers also play a large part in helping us achieve our strategic goals and deliver impact through supporting our work.



# A DECADE OF ACHIEVEMENT 2013-2023

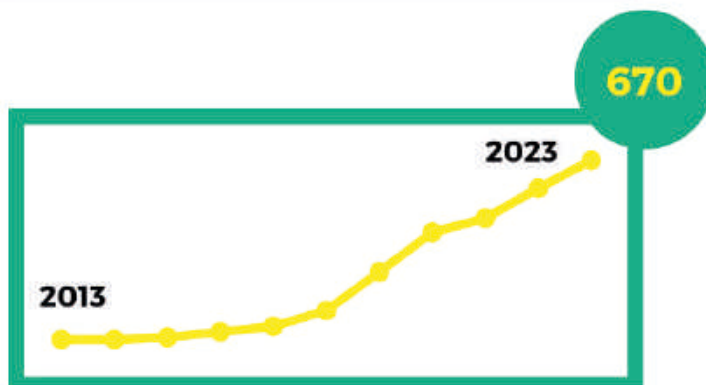
## BIKE DONATIONS

11,348 refugees provided with refurbished bikes and cycle safety kit



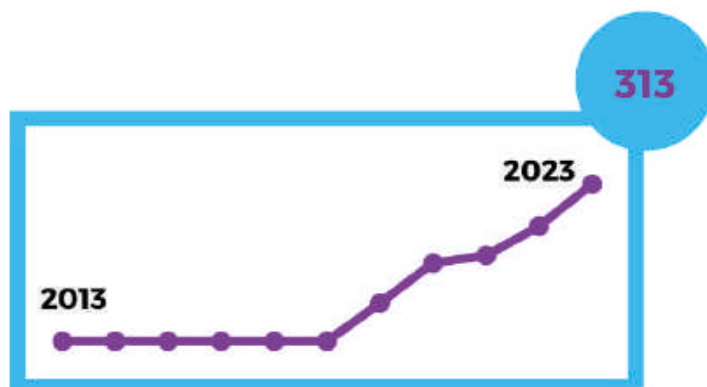
## PEDAL POWER

670 refugee women have accessed women-only cycle lessons



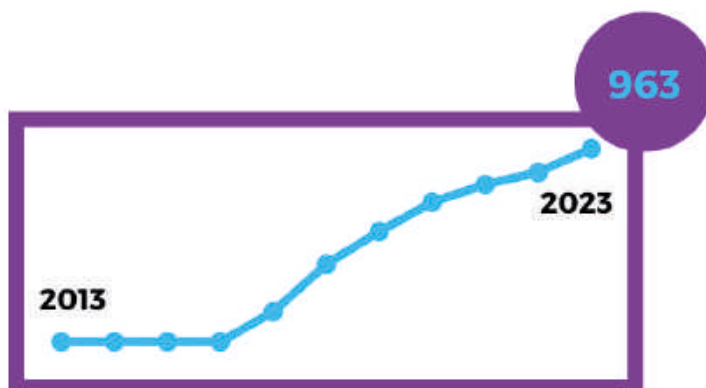
## BIKE BUDDIES

313 refugees have been matched with a local buddy to go cycling together



## VOLUNTEERING

963 volunteers contributed 14,995 hours of time and skills





## ENVIRONMENTAL



**1,661 tonnes** of carbon emissions avoided through reuse\*

## FINANCIAL



**£11.8 million** cost savings to benefit refugees and people seeking asylum\*\*

## SOCIAL ENTERPRISE



**5,961 bikes** sold through our shop and shipped nationwide

## BUILDING COMMUNITY



**739 people** attended 241 social events and activities

## NATIONAL EXPANSION



Supported people in **39 regions, cities and towns** across the UK\*\*\*

## AWARD-WINNING



**Winner of 6 awards** including from the European Union and National Lottery

\*Based on estimate of 96kg CO<sub>2</sub>e per bike manufactured (European Cycling Federation)

\*\*Based on estimates of average public transport costs saved from one year of cycling

\*\*\* Starting in London and expanding to the West Midlands, Manchester, Teesside, Coventry, Oxford, Cambridge, Buxton, Luton, Bedford, Worcester, Essex, Scunthorpe, Rugby, Brighton, Newcastle, Leeds, Banbury, Leamington Spa, Canterbury, Portsmouth, Doncaster, Derby, Crewe, Gloucester, Ipswich, Nottingham, Plymouth, Sheffield, Southampton, Leicester, Stratford Upon Avon, Reading, Slough, Stoke on Trent and Surrey.







# 3. THE CONTEXT OF OUR WORK

The last fifteen months have been challenging for refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. The UK government has continued to pursue its policy of creating a hostile environment in relation to immigration, despite widespread criticism of the lack of commitment to the protection of refugees.

## **An increasingly hostile environment**

In 2022, the Nationality and Borders Act made sweeping changes to the immigration system, contravening international laws and undermining the purpose for which the UN Refugee Convention was established (UNHCR, 2023). Originally dubbed the “Anti-Refugee Bill” it has created a discriminatory two-tier system of refugee protection, offshore processing, the criminalization of people seeking asylum and the implementation of unproven and harmful methods of age assessments for young people.



## Unfair and inefficient case processing

Recent cuts to legal aid for people seeking asylum have made it harder to access justice and have claims fairly considered. The average waiting time to receive a Home Office decision is now 18 months and at the end of March 2023, there was a record 172,758 people waiting for an outcome on their initial claim (Refugee Council, 2023). In addition, 43% of refusals were overturned on appeal, meaning many are reliant on the courts rather than government to award protection. The backlog of inconsistent decisions and inefficient processing leaves people's lives in limbo for years, increases destitution and can have a profound impact on mental health. As of March 2023, there were 51,546 people unable to meet their basic living needs (in receipt of Section 98 support) which is nearly 20 times higher than pre-pandemic levels (ONS, 2023).

## A cost-of-living crisis is nothing new

A person seeking asylum on arrival is not permitted to work but in 2022 they received £40.85 asylum support per week, which was increased to £45 after a High Court ruling against the Home Secretary in December (Gov UK, 2022). Even before the cost-of-living crisis, this falls far short of essential living expenses and does not match the uplifts awarded to other state support such as Universal Credit. Simultaneously, those in receipt of Section 95 or Section 4 support (in "full board" accommodation) had payments limited to just £8.24 per week, experienced delays in payments and had unfair restrictions imposed on their movements.

## Dispersal, housing and lack of support

Many people, including unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, have been sent to live across the UK, often at very short notice to areas without specialised support or essential services. This is compounded by the key issue of digital exclusion and illiteracy, and has resulted in increased isolation, loneliness and a rise in hate crime.

During the lengthy asylum process, people are poorly accommodated, often in temporary bridging hotels and hostels, barges and military barracks, described as "squalid" by the High Court which judged them to be unlawful. There has also been an increase in people indefinitely detained in immigration removal centers in the UK. Living in these conditions has a devastating impact on independence and mobility, but also on physical and mental health and can force people into homelessness.

## Lack of safe and legal routes

Reducing the number of people claiming asylum is a key government policy, and although fewer people are being granted protection through resettlement schemes than pre-pandemic there remains a lack of safe and legal passage for people to enter the UK. This has resulted in the continuation of dangerous and unnecessary channel crossings and the loss of lives in the process. Further to this, it is estimated that proposed legislation to prevent anyone who crossed the channel from having their asylum claim processed will leave an additional 45,000 at risk of destitution and homelessness (Refugee Council, 2023).

## Economic, social and political turbulence

External challenges and the persistence of crisis events such as the war in Ukraine, mean that charities in the refugee sector are at risk. Staff burnout is widely reported, and charities have little capacity to plan for the future as they struggle to meet the challenges of increased operational and delivery costs, rising demand for services and compete for limited funding. The rise of populism of the far right and media focus on small boat crossings have led to increased racism and xenophobia: just 24% of the public believe that those crossing are genuinely fleeing persecution and 42% of Britons think the government is letting too many people in (YouGov, 2022). This situation heightens anxiety for staff and services users alike, increasing welfare needs for the sector.







THE  
PROJECT

# 4. OUR ACTIVITIES THIS YEAR

*“A bike cannot fix a broken asylum system, but it actually really helps, it helps a lot.”*

**Hassan Akkad**

Bike recipient and BAFTA winner

Despite the concerning backdrop, The Bike Project continues to address the vital issue of transport poverty and refugee mobility (or lack of) through social innovation which promotes solidarity, builds community and celebrates diversity in a way that is actively inclusive and enables refugee voices to be heard.

At the beginning of 2023, The Bike Project faced some significant financial challenges which required the focus of the Board and team to resolve. This was achieved through a variety of interventions including a fundraising campaign and a restructure. We continue to be focused on ensuring our sustainability and building a fit and

resilient organisation which can withstand future challenges.

However, over the past fifteen months we have supported more people than ever before, and by using our London and Birmingham workshops as hubs we were able to reach people from further afield in Manchester, Coventry, Teesside, Oxford and Cambridge. Around this activity, we provided a community for refugees to connect through cycling by hosting online socials, activities and in-person events (including yoga, bike maintenance, picnics, bike rides and art workshops) which were well attended throughout the year. We participated in a research project with



The Open City Project resulting in an evaluation report and [short film](#) about our work on Pedal Power that was screened in London.

In terms of recognition for our work, our CEO, some trustees and several bike recipients had the opportunity to share our work with King Charles who met with them on a visit to one of our drop-off points in London. We were also honoured to win The New Statesman's Positive Impact in Transport award.

## Bike Donations

Through our bike donation programme we collected a total of 6,102 abandoned or unwanted bikes from the public and refurbished a record 2,506 bikes that were donated to refugees and people seeking asylum along with essential cycle accessories (helmet, locks, lights and hi-viz). After being matched with a suitable bike and accessories we offer people test rides, journey planning, road safety advice, demonstrate bike locking and give preventative maintenance tips. Outside the reach of our hubs, we donated bikes through charity partners in Manchester, Teesside,

Cambridge and Oxford as part of our national roadshow activity.

## Repair or Replace

As the number of people that we have supported has grown, so does the volume of work that it takes to keep their bikes on the road. In the previous fifteen months we answered calls for advice and technical support and arranged appointments for 185 bikes to come in for maintenance or repair. As a result, we fitted 587 replacement parts (such as brake pads, cables and inner tubes) and replaced 172 bikes entirely to ensure that people can keep cycling safely, for as long as needed.



# ACTIVITY REPORT

Jan 2022-  
Mar 2023



Carried out repairs or replaced parts on **185** bikes that we issued



Refurbished, sold and shipped **1,609** bikes to customers nationwide



**2,506** bikes refurbished and donated to refugees and people seeking asylum



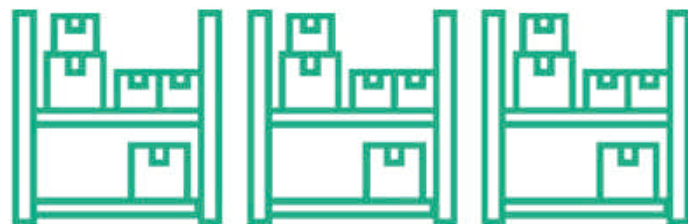
Matched **39** refugees with a local Bike Buddy



Supported **105** Pedal Power participants to learn to cycle



Managed **139** volunteers who contributed to our charitable activity



Collected **6,102** bikes from our network of **64** drop off points



Hosted **242** events and activities online or in person



Secured over **£2.2 million** income\*

\* Subject to annual accounts publication in October 2023.



## Pedal Power

Women-only cycling lessons ran on a one-to-one basis with a plan to revive group lessons that ceased owing to the Covid-19 pandemic. By the end of 2022, group lessons had been re-instated in London, and we had 105 participants in the programme overall, supporting our aim of reducing inequalities of access to cycling and overcoming some of the unique barriers facing refugee women. Several participants have returned to volunteer with the project, and where suitable we have sponsored participants to complete their National Standards qualifications or Ride Leader training so that they are able to join our team of instructors.

## Bike Buddies

We experience high demand for a Bike Buddy and the role of Bike Buddy volunteer is often over-subscribed. To tackle this, we are developing an online matching portal to speed up the matching process and we were able to host a further two inductions, training 22 more volunteers in Oxford, Cambridge, Coventry, London and Birmingham.

Our training was rated excellent by those attending and we had a total of 39 matches that resulted in successful meetups. Many enjoyed it so much that they met more than the suggested three times.

## Volunteering

Despite the political and economic climate, we receive continual interest in volunteering and 117 people contributed their time and skills to all sorts of opportunities, ranging from mechanics, to providing support in our shop, our programme delivery and at fundraising events. Over half of the volunteers run our network of 64 drop-off points, collecting abandoned bikes for us to bring into our workshop for repair.





In addition, last year we ran an intensive month-long volunteering pilot, “Changi-neers” supporting 12 bike recipient volunteers to learn mechanics fixing bikes in our workshop with the aim of empowering people with basic bike maintenance skills. The programme delivered on our commitment to develop refugee talent and provided a welcome space and opportunity for social interaction to reduce isolation.

## Social Action Heroes

We received continuation funding to deliver a second round of a social action project that was set up in response to demand from young refugees who were inspired by the transformative power of cycling. Over the summer we ran workshops on cycle safety, storytelling, marketing and social media with support from partner organisations and led activities at the local velodrome and outdoor activity centres. The programme had 23 participants and 12 graduates who gained qualifications and went on to take up further volunteering or training opportunities, start work experience placements and join local cycling groups.

## Fundraising and Events

Hundreds of incredible supporters undertook various fundraising challenges including RideLondon, London Marathon and their own creative challenges. Our flagship virtual fundraising challenge, Refugee Routes, grew in popularity. With more participants taking part independently and in groups representing their workplaces, they cycled the same number of miles that many people seeking asylum travel to reach safety.

Our Jokes and Spokes Comedy Fundraisers were back in action, with headliners from James Acaster for our sell-out show at The Union Chapel, and Dylan Moran at The Comedy Store. Together, the events raised over £50,000, with the company Weil supporting them.



Our Christmas match funding appeal exceeded its goal whilst promoting the artwork of bike recipients who created personalized e-cards to go alongside the gifts on our website.

We built upon our partnership with SunGod, who have supported The Bike Project for two years, as they turned a bike recipient's painting into a Limited-Edition microfiber case to raise donations with the purchase of any sunglasses. We also founded a new corporate partnership with Bolt which turned driver hubs into bike drop off points and featured The Bike Project on an in-app donation function.

Sales of our refurbished bikes went from strength to strength as we achieved our highest sales in 2022 (both online and in-store) through our newly opened bike shop located on a busy cycling route in Camberwell, London.

To top it off, we were delighted to be hosted at Mercers' Hall in central London for our event Ukraine - Voices from the Frontline in early March. The event brought together existing and potential supporters for an evening of discussion about the conflict in Ukraine, its impact and our response to the crisis. Broadcaster Mishal Husain chaired the panel discussion, which included contributions from Paul Adams, the BBC's Diplomatic Correspondent, Orysia Lutsevych, Deputy Director of the Russia and Eurasia Programme and Head of the Ukraine Forum at Chatham House and Olga Parashchuk, Business Support Officer, Homes for Ukraine Team, Bromley Borough Council.

## Social Impact Storytelling

Our team work hard to share our stories and those of the people that we meet, and in 2022 we partnered with bike recipient and BAFTA award winner Hassan Akkad to produce a campaign film, [Tour de Asylum](#), which asked people to sign a declaration and stand with refugees. We also ran a nationwide appeal for bike donations in response to the Ukraine refugee emergency. We have reached new audiences through this activity and achieved coverage in over 50 media outlets including [The Independent](#), [Evening standard](#), [ITV](#), [BBC](#) and local radio. Our social pages have grown another 21%, now totaling just over 23,000 combined reach across Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and we have continued to expand our newsletter following, which now has a total of 13,300 subscribers.









# 5. OUR IMPACT

*“It makes me feel that someone cares about me and is actually thinking about my wellbeing... the sense of independence and ownership feels great.”*

**Assif**

Bike recipient

With every bike we refurbish, the power of giving the gift of a bike can be realised. Every bike donation represents an individual seeking refuge in the UK, who is in the process of rebuilding their life, people who are hardest hit by the hostile environment, austerity cuts, cost of living crisis, and rising anti-immigration sentiment. In this context, the impact of the gift of a bike cannot be underestimated.

It is well cited that cycling improves health, helps reduce levels of depression and stress, and empowers refugees (Garrard, 2003) but specific research conducted with

bike recipients (Witty-Merrin et al., 2018) found that The Bike Project:

- Provides opportunities to bring people together from different backgrounds
- Reduces prejudice and negative stereotyping and increases trust
- Reduces social isolation, loneliness and increases social confidence

Further research conducted by St George's University, London in 2019 and 2020 found that by combining cycling with group activities, The Bike Project has provided a vital stepping stone into resettlement for refugees, leading to improvements in health and wellbeing and opening access to community and social support.

*“From my experience, I see lots of refugees in this country get depression because they have to stay at home all the time, they don’t do any activity but I’m really happy. I think one of the most important reasons is because I met The Bike Project. The bike changed my life a lot.”*

*Edris*

In the same research, Pedal Power was cited as highly influential in breaking the barriers for refugee women to access the wider community through increased confidence and reduced financial barriers to explore their local areas. The Bike Project also enables refugee women to access further opportunities to develop themselves as cycle trainers or mechanics and lend support to others.

*“Before I was thinking about myself, my problems. I was not aware of what other ladies or other asylum seekers are facing. By talking to them, I learnt their problems, what they have to face, what they have to go through, and how they manage it...and how I can be helpful for them. That’s what I learnt from volunteering, how you help other people.”*

*Sadaf*

Additionally, volunteers of The Bike Project were found to have better self-esteem and outlook on life because of relationships they have formed whether through opportunities like Bike Buddies or supporting the delivery of our work, which leads to expanding understanding and insight into immigration struggles amongst the wider population. The study concluded that any continuation and expansion of The Bike Project’s activities would result in an improvement in quality of life for refugees living across the UK.

*“When I think or hear about refugees and all that stuff... I think about my pal who I ride bikes with, it has really helped to humanise the issue even more. It reminds you that whatever you have got going on is really insignificant to the vast majority of people in the world.”*

*Will*

## **Increased independence and mobility**

Cycling can unlock independence and mobility to allow fuller participation in communities, something which has been long cited as integral to the promotion of refugee well-being and integration (Goodkind et al., 2002). On follow-up with bike recipients 93% use their bike for essential journeys every week and as a result, 97% know their local area better and 91% have used it to visit new places and do new things.

*“Now I feel comfortable to go out, especially in COVID times. I wasn’t leaving the house before but now I can go where I want when I want and quickly.”*

*Anonymous*

This sense of independence and self-sufficiency is a recurrent theme amongst survey respondents who develop greater autonomy as result of bike ownership. This becomes even more pronounced with the support of a Bike Buddy or Pedal Power cycle trainer.

## **Better physical and mental health**

Since getting their bike, 92% of bike recipients think that their physical health has improved and 89% say that their mental health has improved. Many tell us that cycling has provided the opportunity to reconnect with their bodies and get rid of the stresses of daily life. This is supported by wider evidence that increased physical activity reduces the risk of health conditions and improves mental health for refugees, who have experienced and are recovering from severe trauma. This is because exercise relieves stress, gives day-to-day structure and supports mental well-being (Warburton et al., 2019).

In the last fifteen months we have refurbished and got 2,506 bikes on the road. After six months, 90% of bike recipients are using their bike at least once a week for essential journeys. However, there is more to our work than just getting people cycling, and so three and six months after a bike collection, we ask bike recipients about the financial, practical, physical and emotional benefits that they have experienced:

**Practical and financial benefits**



**85%** are doing more social and leisure activities



**95%** say having a bike makes life easier

**84%** are saving money by cycling



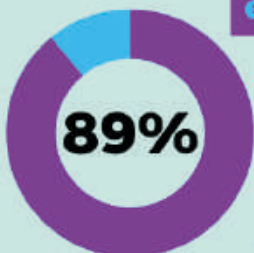
**90%** are better able to access support and services



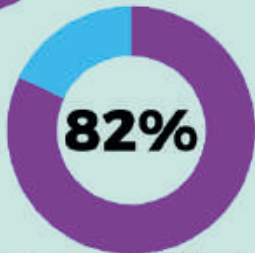
**97%** know their local area better

**Physical and emotional benefits**

More than just a bike...



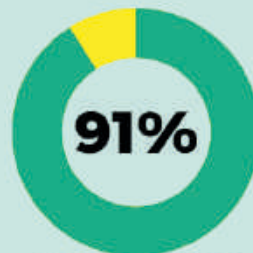
**89%** say their mental health has improved



**82%** feel more confident and independent



**82%** feel less lonely and isolated



**91%** are using their bike to visit new places or do new things



**86%** feel more part of the community



**92%** felt their physical health has improved

**Environmental benefit**



Avoided **395 tonnes** of CO2e emissions from the refurbishment and reuse of bikes \*

**Financial benefit**

Afforded **£2.6 million** in costs savings for refugees and people seeking asylum\*\*



\*Based on estimate of 96kg CO2e per bike manufactured (European Cycling Federation)

\*\* Based on estimate of average public transport costs savings from one year of cycling



*“They give you everything, the helmet, the jacket, the lock and key, the water bottle, even the carrier for groceries. It was a bit like renovating or decorating your home. It’s very important for asylum seekers, to own it, to have a sense of ownership, to say ‘This is mine’.”*

## **Anonymous**

### **Pedal Power Participant**

*“It’s very nice because all my muscles is working and the blood circulation much better. In my blood pressure, I felt last week, when I check is much better than before. Yeah, yes no more pain killers!”*

*Anonymous*

When physical activity takes place in a social setting, such as Pedal Power and Bike Buddies, it can go further to reduce stress post migration, improve mental wellbeing, enhance self-efficacy and reduce the risk of mortality and depression (Hartley et al., 2017).

*“It helped me to find new friends, and now we are talking about our problems and we have same experience, and we discuss each other about our experiences. It makes me feel stronger and more confident in myself”*

*Anonymous*

## **Financial benefit**

Transport is the biggest household expenditure in the UK: a bus pass in most areas costs an average of £20 per week, and from this, we estimate a minimum annual saving of c. £1040 for every bike that we donate. This estimate could be much higher as refugees living on limited means often pay

per journey instead of realising the savings a weekly pass provides - unless lucky enough to be living in Wales where public transport is provided free of charge. Consequently, relief from transport poverty is a primary motivator for needing a bike in the first place and so it is not surprising that 81% of bike recipients tell us they are saving money because they are now cycling to get from A to B.

*“I use my bike to travel to my job. It is healthier because I am cycling. It is free so I save money, or I use the money for my kids or other needs instead of spending it on traveling costs. It is also timesaving. I like cycling because it gives me some freedom of traveling.”*

*Edris*

## **Reducing isolation and loneliness**

In 2017, the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness cited research which found that 58% of refugees found loneliness and isolation their biggest challenge. After receiving a bike, 82% of bike recipients feel less lonely and isolated and 82% say they feel part of a new community of cyclists. Refugees feel better connected with their local area and are making twice as many trips for social or

leisure reasons - put simply, cyclists speak to each other, as one bike recipient said about Bike Buddies:

*“They’re not just giving me a free bike, they’re giving me somebody who I can go riding with and I can be friendly with, who I can talk to and especially somebody like me...who comes from a different country and is new in the area...to know somebody and to know places, it’s a really good thing.”*

*Anonymous*

## Gender equality

Women (including children) make up just 22% of asylum claims in the UK (Home Office, 2021) and despite gains made to close the gender divide in cycling during the cycling boom of 2020, just a third of all cycle trips are made by women, and even less by women of colour. This could put refugee women at a double disadvantage but our work to achieve representation of women in cycling has seen us make great progress.

This year, 30% of all bike recipients were women (compared to just 4% when we started out in 2013). Concentrating on reducing our own gender gap is why we created Pedal Power, cycle training for refugee women, led by refugee women, which makes cycling more accessible by supporting women to overcome the barriers that refugee women face.

*“I use my bike for moving about, not sitting still, getting rid of stress, forgetting about what I saw in DRC.”*

*Dorcas*

Provision of cycle training, social group support and activities also encourages these refugee women to reach guidelines of moderate-intensity physical activity a week. This is vitally important as compared to the

general population, refugee women are more likely to suffer from PTSD (Schubert et al., 2011), anxiety and depression (Llacer et al., 2009), social isolation, lack of opportunity (Hassan et al., 2016), obesity (Van der Kloof, 2015), as well as lower cardio-respiratory fitness (Guerin et al., 2007).

*“The cycling instructor helped me to get back my confidence and to know the rules of the road. In Pedal Power we enjoy learning and experiencing new things with people who share the same situation as us. We also meet weekly online, it’s like we are actually meeting in person. We enjoy our time like a family.”*

*Nada*



## Empowerment and confidence

Empowerment encompasses a process that helps people gain control over their lives, within which lies the sub-theme of confidence to overcome barriers. We see this demonstrated on follow up with bike recipients, 82% of who feel more confident and independent after receiving a bike.

*“I feel very confident...I’ve started to think there’s a lot of things I just said in my head and I think I can’t do this, can’t do this. Now I know if I, if I really want to do something I should give it a go first. And, if it doesn’t work then I know I tried. Rather than just sit back and think oh it’s difficult.”*

*Anonymous*

We find that women who have gone through Pedal Power training frequently describe a new sense of self-belief of being able to do whatever they wanted and having the confidence to try new things. This was supported by the Open City Project which found that it was the physical object of the bike and The Bike Project community that was so important.

*“I can do anything. No one, anyone says you are a woman, stay at home and like this. I can go with myself, what time I want and come back when I want.*

*I can do anything I want. No one says ‘don’t do that’... Freedom. Yes. Freedom... I can do anything I want... go out in the morning and go to the park... just the freedom of having a bike makes me feel confident”*

*Anonymous*





## Nurturing talent

Despite bringing with them a wealth of experience and skills (over 40% of refugees hold formal qualifications before coming to the UK) unemployment still stands at around 36% and those who are employed are often working well below their capabilities. The increased confidence from learning about the local area through cycling enables individuals to pursue local opportunities and opens the possibility of gaining employment. Consequently, we find that bike recipients are more likely to be in work, training or education.

*“We found the skills useful and practical. I feel the skills will help me to build my business in the future. The qualification also will be asked by the next event we are going to join, so it’s a game-changer.”*

*Farzad*

People are encouraged to return to us for volunteering to learn new skills at our workshop, office or Pedal Power sessions. Interviews with our volunteers found that volunteering has been particularly helpful for those prohibited from working so that they can feel part of a supportive community, develop skills and confidence to increase preparedness for the UK workplace.

## Environmental impact

We play a part in the circular economy, providing a solution for extending the life-cycle of a bike, reducing its overall environmental impact and role in waste accumulation, at a time when there is rising concern about the end of use consideration for mass produced sporting products. We estimate that by committing to a sustainable model of reuse, we have saved 1,661 tonnes of carbon emissions (CO<sub>2</sub>e) and avoided the depletion of resources caused by the manufacture of new bikes since we launched. We also ensure that no parts are wasted, stripping down bikes which we cannot refurbish for parts and putting these to good use also, not only reducing waste but affording bike recipients a better quality product than if we sourced new bikes or parts within the same price point.

Environmental benefit is something that resonates with bike recipients when asked what cycling means to them, also extending to improved air quality as any shift towards cycling as a means of transport has promoted cleaner and healthier streets.



## Public perceptions

Research with our volunteers has shown that by talking about and sharing experiences, they have increased understanding around the refugee crisis and examined their privilege as a lifelong UK citizen. We take a proactive approach with the media, working with refugees and people seeking asylum to tell their stories within the context of our work, counter stereotypes and increase representation of women in sport.

*“I personally witnessed and experienced the help that the bike has given me. That is why we are making the film, so people can get engaged, can take out that bike that is rusting in their shed and give it to The Bike Project so they can refurbish it and give it to people who really need it.”*

*Hassan Akkad*

*Bike Recipient and BAFTA winner*

This year we featured across 50 media outlets, including newspapers such as The Independent, Evening Standard, ITV and BBC and local radio, providing multiple opportunities for the positive representation of refugees and people seeking asylum in the media.

This, at a time when rising hostility is deterring others from doing so, should not be overlooked and we hope to encourage others to share their stories so that the public can see that there is much more to people than their immigration status. By taking our services and support to new cities, we have also enhanced support and increased the visibility of refugees and people seeking asylum through increased access to cycling within these communities.









# 6. REFUGEE VOICES

In the year ending March 2023, there was a 33% increase in asylum applications in the UK from the previous 12-month period, owing to the continued global increase in the number of people displaced due to war and conflict. However, per capita, the UK ranks just 22nd in Europe for number of asylum applications (Refugee Council, 2023) and is home to just 1% of the 26.4 million refugees, a diverse population, who have been forcibly displaced from their home countries across the world.

Here we are lucky to share some of the voices of the thousands of people that we meet, risking everything to find safety and at the beginning of rebuilding their lives in the UK.

# WHO WE HAVE SUPPORTED



Over the past fifteen months we have supported people from **55 countries**



The youngest person was a **one year old boy** from Eritrea, receiving a balance bike, and the eldest was a **76 year old woman** from Nigeria



**19%**  
were families



**29%**  
identified as female



**55%**  
were under the age of 25

**59%** came from just six countries: **Iran, Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea and Ukraine**



**9%** were unaccompanied minors



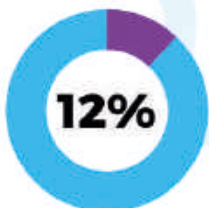
**30%** of people seeking asylum were **not in receipt of any state support**



**76%** of people with refugee status were **unemployed**



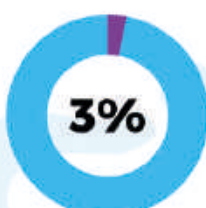
Bike recipients were seeking refuge in **Greater London, the West Midlands, Bristol, Oxford, Cambridge, Teesside and Manchester**



**12%**  
were **destitute** (unable to meet their basic living needs)



**5%**  
had a **physical disability or mental illness**



**3%**  
were classed as **vulnerable** for a reason not listed

## BIKE DONATION

On the 24th of February, Katya and her family had to leave Ukraine after the Russian invasion. Before then she lived a normal life. Her 8 year old daughter had been going to school and she had been working in one of the best companies in Ukraine. But unfortunately, when the war started, she did not feel safe, and she made the difficult decision to leave Ukraine and her family. This is her story:

*“On the 26th of April me, my daughter and my mom arrived in the United Kingdom. As newcomers we had no experience of London life, and we missed much of our previous life and habits, one of them being bike riding. My daughter started riding a bike at the age of 3, we explored all the routes and parks in Kyiv, and we missed it very much.*”

*Our host did his best to help us, he found out about The Bike Project and made a bike application for my daughter. In early June we went to The Bike Project to pick up our new bikes, I did not tell my daughter till the last minute where we were going, it was a real surprise, I have not seen her so happy and excited for a very long time.*

*Having a bike here reminds us of our previous life and gives us a taste of it. We feel freedom riding bikes! Our bikes allow us to explore London, be independent and keep healthy. I would love people to donate their bikes to make another person's dream come true.”*

### **KATYA** Bike Recipient





## REPAIR OR REPLACE

Robina first came across The Bike Project by accessing a cycling lesson at Pedal Power with her daughter. There she learned to ride a bike as an adult and is now, like many others completely reliant on her bike. When it broke she was able to bring it to our workshop for repairs where she has received help and even learned how to carry out maintenance herself.

*“My name is Robina and I am 57 years old. But I feel like 40 plus! First time I met The Bike Project at Pedal Power I don’t know how to ride. I got my first bike first there. I was very happy.*

*My life has changed after getting the bike I am going anywhere with my bike very fast. And my health is much better - before I was too much lazy and slow.*

*I am feeling sick if I am not able to use my bike. If feel have some problems like brake, handle, chain, or some noise when riding I go to the workshop. I have fixed by myself and sometimes a mechanic they help. I saw when people are there to get their bike or repair it they said “we are very happy”.*

*The Bike Project and workshop have a big job to do. They help lots of asylum seekers, give help with repairs and most important, they give good health, confidence, and happiness.”*

## ROBINA Bike Recipient



## PEDAL POWER

Nada and her family arrived in the UK and knew no one, but she got a bike, took Pedal Power lessons, made friends and accepted one of our placements to train to become a Ride Leader and was featured on [Midlands Today Evening News](#). The importance of having a bike is clear to her, as she explains:

*“When I arrived in the UK it was a lockdown. I didn’t have friends or family. My kids didn’t have anyone, and school wasn’t running. I knew how to cycle before, but I forgot. The Pedal Power cycling instructor helped me to get back my confidence and to know the rules of the road. In Pedal Power we enjoy learning and experiencing new things with people who share the same situation as us...We enjoy our time like a family.*”

*The Ride Leader Qualification helped me a lot to help others and my family as well. I learned the rules about cycling in the street, I drive in confidence on difficult roads. It gave me experience taking care of my kids on the road. Me and my kids...spend time riding the bike... and it helped us to exercise and stay healthy.*

*The Bike Project helps people in the beginning of their time in the UK to find a way to share their feelings and to do something useful with their time. And at the same time to make friends.”*

## **NADA** **Pedal Power Graduate**





## BIKE BUDDIES

Rawand is 25 years old from Kurdistan, a region located in the North of Iraq. He had been in the UK just over a year when he came to collect his bike:

*“When I got my bike, it became a friend for me to make my activities much easier. My life changed as I could do more activities and also visit different places which are a little bit difficult to walk.*

*Elisse, gave me a Christmas card for that first meet-up. She has a wonderful personality, kind with a lovely smile always. She knew Coventry better than me, so I visited different places with her. My favourite thing about Bike Buddies is you feel that you have friends through sports. Also, they are someone that encourages you to cycle more and supports you with that, teaching you some life skills.*

*The Bike Project is doing a great thing for refugees. I used to ride my bike back home. When The Bike Project gave me the bike it gave me happiness thinking of my memories of back home. In my opinion people must support The Bike Project because they provide good bikes full of love to the refugees that came from different countries, welcoming them.”*

**RAWAND, Bike Buddy**

Elisse heard about The Bike Project from a friend and completed the Bike Buddies application process and induction and was paired with Rawand in December. They met for a ride shortly after. On their first ride they went along Coventry Canal.

*“Since our first meeting, we have met several times for rides exploring the local countryside. Rawand is interested in art, so we have visited several exhibitions and galleries. I have introduced Rawand to some friends who are artists, one of whom painted a portrait of him. Rawand was very excited! Rawand has had some of his own artwork on display at the Herbert Art Gallery. It was a delight to see his work.*

*My favourite thing about Bike Buddies is sharing my love of cycling and the local area with another person. Rawand is a lovely kind young man, and it is an absolute pleasure to spend time with him introducing him to people and places. I think Bike Buddies is important as it helps refugees find their feet, giving them a degree of independence. It would be great if more people were to become involved with The Bike Project. I believe you get more out of it, than you put in. It is a privilege to share your knowledge with someone who is eager to learn.”*

**ELISSE, Bike Buddy**





## VOLUNTEER

Comfort joined Pedal Power in August 2017. At this point she had been here for over two years but had only recently claimed asylum. Comfort often talks about how she originally attended Pedal Power to access the travel money that we provide – but from the very first time she got on her bike; she says her life has changed.

*“Cycling gives you freedom. I can ride anywhere I need to be. Cycling gives you wings, you’re flying. It brings such happiness and joy. The fact that I have a bike that helps me with transportation has made it a little bit easier.”*

After graduating from Pedal Power and being given her very own bike, Comfort displayed interest in continuing to support us with cycling. Working with our operations team, we sponsored her to complete her NSI accredited cycle instructor training. After that, she continued to volunteer for us as a Pedal Power instructor. Sadly, her immigration status prohibited her from working, so we couldn’t offer Comfort employment at this point.

*“The Bike Project gave me a sense of belonging, like I’m part of a community. I can be someone, I can make changes to my environment. I do over 30 hours of volunteering - it helps me to keep going.”*

Not only did Comfort volunteer as a cycling instructor, but she also volunteered as a mechanic each week in our workshop, refurbishing bikes that would go to refugees and people seeking asylum just like her.

In 2021, Comfort was selected to join the Board of Trustees, and now works with The Bike Project much more closely, advising the senior management team on how to support refugees and people seeking asylum better. Comfort says that the impact of being a trustee will allow her to be part of those who look after the wellbeing of refugees:

*“When I first got my bike, my life very quickly revolved around the project and around Pedal Power. So, when the call was put out, welcoming applicants for the trustees with lived experience, I wanted to apply immediately.”*

*I’ve gone through every part of The Bike Project. From participant to volunteer, and instructor – I know as much as possible what it is like for the average person going through the process. I believe I will be able to share that experience with those on the Board. Where have I been and where I want to go, as a refugee and thinking about what’s good for them, especially as we continue to expand.”*

### COMFORT Volunteer







# 7. MOVING FORWARD

## **Challenges and lessons learned**

The challenges we have experienced relate in large part to the rising demand for services owing to increased destitution amongst the people that we support, rising operational costs, the difficult fundraising landscape and staff changes. The combination of these challenges meant we had to take steps to secure our future. This took energy and time and the establishment of new practices. It was encouraging to see how quickly we were able to adapt and respond to these challenges and many of the practices we adopted at the time will hold us well now and into the future.

We have also proven our ability to demonstrate the value of our work to new audiences and quickly secure their assistance and we plan to build upon this momentum in our fundraising strategy moving forwards.

In addition to the above, staff engagement and retention is something we are working to address but are also conscious that this is a sector-wide issue. We are seeking to improve staff engagement, welfare and benefits and take it as a positive that we have retained core staff and attracted new people with significant skills and experience to the organisation.



## Future plans

Our vision remains one in which all refugees and people seeking asylum across the UK should have access to the financial, practical, social and emotional benefits of cycling. And to this aim, we have restricted our development work to our core strategic objectives and are carefully monitoring our income and expenditure, ensuring that we are delivering value for money and maximizing the potential to generate our own source of income through retail activities. We plan to diversify our income including through earned sources to give us greater financial independence.

We will continue to find ways to take our services to new locations via our roadshow activity, starting with Manchester, Leicester and Sheffield in the year ahead. We will also strategically fundraise to better support volunteer management across the organisation so that we can maximise our potential to benefit from the time, skills and experience on offer.

We will continue to carefully monitor our output and outcomes to ensure that we are having a long-lasting impact on the lives of people that we support including a commitment to better understand the environmental impact of our operations and the value of our model of reuse.

We are however operating within the context of a government policy which actively seeks to create a hostile environment for refugees and people seeking asylum including restricting access to financial support, employment, housing and leaving people increasingly vulnerable after arrival to the UK. This means that whilst we may seek to manage our internal operations and costs, we will continue to encounter rising demand for support from an increasingly vulnerable and destitute population, adding layers of

complexity to our service delivery. We remain committed to improving the lives of refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK. We will continue to provide a platform for the positive representation of the people that we support in the media and enable their voices to be heard to counter rising hostility. And throughout all, we will strive to achieve quality outcomes for bike recipients to unlock the transformative power of cycling to maximise the impact of every bike that we donate.





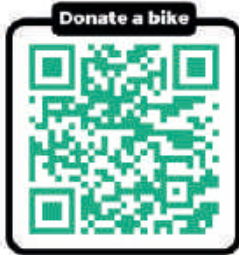
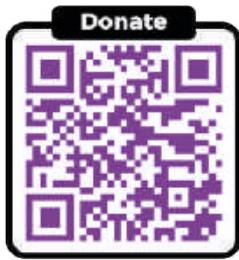
# 8. OUR SUPPORTERS

The Bike Project only exists because of the generosity of our supporters. We would like to thank everybody that has donated a bike or their time throughout the last fifteen months. We also give thanks for the support of our financial donors and fundraisers, and the following trusts, funds and organisations, without which the achievements outlined in this report would not have been possible.

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If you would like further information about any aspect of our work or the information contained in this report then please contact Nicola Hill, Head of Grants and Impact via [Nicola@thebikeproject.co.uk](mailto:Nicola@thebikeproject.co.uk).

