

CYCLING TO SUCCESS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Abandoned bikes from the University of Leeds are enjoying a new lease of life in rural South Africa thanks to an ongoing project led by the university's sport development team and local charity, The Bambisanani Partnership. Over the last four years the bikes have found their way to Mnyakanya High School in Kwa-Zulu Natal to support the charity's inspirational Cycle to Success programme.

Each summer, staff and students from the University of Leeds and Leeds Trinity University travel to South Africa to deliver a week of cycling-based activities to pupils at the school. Travel to and from school in these remote areas can be challenging, with some pupils walking two hours every day to access education. The university students and staff spend a week teaching pupils how to ride and maintain bikes – a commonplace skill in the UK but a life-changing and mobilising one in this part of South Africa! The programme ultimately helps pupils to develop confidence and skills which support them to remain in the education system as well as the mechanical skills needed to keep the bikes moving. Through partnership work in the UK with university campus Sustainability and Security Services, more than 20 bikes a year are refurbished and shipped to Mnyakanya along with new bikes acquired through university and Bambisanani Partnership fundraising and spare parts and tools funded by the Rob Stephenson Trust. The generous support of Manchester-based shipping giants, Cardinal Maritime, means the bikes are transported free of charge. Many of the old bikes are damaged when they are acquired so university staff and students give up their time to repair them to make sure they are safe and functional when they arrive at the port in Durban. The university student volunteers receive sports leadership and cycling proficiency training in the UK before travelling to South Africa to teach children aged 12-15 how to ride the bikes in just one week. More than 30 South African pupils are supported to learn, regardless of their starting point: some have never sat on a bike before whilst others progress quickly, learning how to signal and ride safely on open roads. Pupils are also supplied with bike parts, such as inner tubes and brake cables, and taught how to repair the bikes which, inevitably, break down more quickly on the dirt roads around

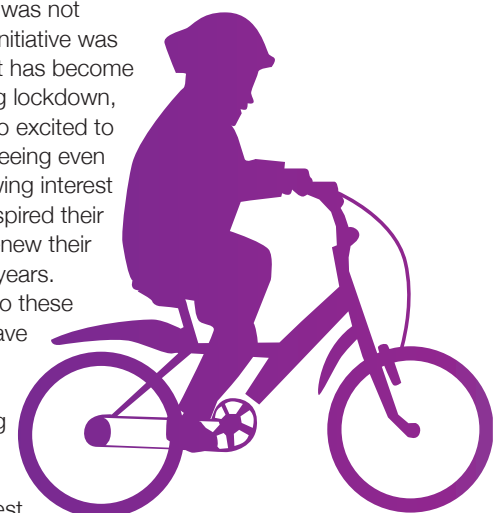
the school. The bikes stay in a hub at the school and are loaned to pupils to overcome the barrier of transport to school where one exists. Additionally, students from Leeds and Mnyakanya also join in a wide range of cultural activities with traditional singing, dancing and sports activities taking place after school each day.

For the past 14 years, The Bambisanani Partnership has worked in one of South Africa's most deprived rural areas, using sport as a catalyst to promote education, health, global citizenship and leadership. The charity has gained international acclaim for its work and the university involvement has taken this to new heights, with the Mnyakanya bike hub and Cycle to Success project being the brainchild of University of Leeds Professional Development Manager, Andrew Lockwood. Andrew was approached in 2015 by The Bambisanani Partnership to support the expansion of its work in South Africa to involve staff and students from the University of Leeds. Andrew accompanied a group from the project's founding school, St Mary's in Menston, on a fact-finding mission that year. Using his expertise and experience in the field of sport development, Andrew engaged with teachers and pupils to understand some of the challenges faced in accessing education and future employment and the idea of the bike hub was born.

Mrs Pk Zondi, Bambisanani Co-ordinator at Mnyakanya High School, said: "Cycling was not that familiar in our community until this initiative was introduced four years ago. Since then, it has become part of the lives of many learners. During lockdown, when schools were closed, they were so excited to be using the bikes. I could not believe seeing even the elder people in the community showing interest in cycling. Mnyakanya young cyclists inspired their elders, who in turn decided to fix and renew their old bikes that had never been used for years. Some of those old bikes were brought to these young cyclists to fix them. We do not have enough words to pass on our gratitude and thanks to the University of Leeds and Leeds Trinity University for changing the lives of our young people." Community member, Senzo Mdlalose, added: "It is so amazing to see the interest



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of cycling growing like this our community. I volunteer in assisting these young people if they have some challenges in repairing their bikes. Cycling helps the young people to not involve themselves in doing bad things. I make sure that they follow the rules of Covid-19 while they are using and fixing the bikes. I so wish that this cycling project may grow stronger.”

Mnyakanya students are in no doubt about the impact of this initiative.

“I love cycling. Sometimes I compete with my friends in a distance of 10 kilometers or more. Cycling has become my daily activity, especially if there is no school. Many people on the road show an exciting interest in our cycling activity. We hear people hooting their taxis and others clapping their hands to encourage our cycling competition. Many people stop and watch what we do.” (Asanda Gabela)

“I am so grateful that I can ride and fix my bicycle for myself. It is now easier for me when my parents send me to a place that is far from home because I use a bike to take that journey. I can ride as many times as I can, even if the weather conditions are bad. The bikes also help me to get to school earlier and faster. When there are heavy rains my books and my school uniform are not getting too wet if I am riding a bike. It is so exciting that the bikes have changed our lives for better.” (Sakhile Magwaza)

“Our lives are becoming easier with bikes. This is all very exciting! Almost all young people in my community like to learn cycling. We also use the bikes for sports and as a transport. Many people in this community have developed the love of cycling. People ride the bikes to work, to their relatives, to shops and others to school. Bikes are so helpful and save money.” (Bonginkosi Magwaza)

Parallel to the impact on the recipients, the impression on the skills and values of the UK students is huge. Skills auditing before, during and after the intervention saw students develop ten top graduate-level skills by an average of 31 per cent from start to completion. “I’m proud to say I helped teach 30 kids how to ride a bicycle in just a few days. I am, however, even prouder to say that a group of 30 kids taught me more than I could have ever imagined. I discovered the perseverance the children had as well as the importance of Zulu culture in those same couple of days!” said Franki Darko, a University of Leeds student who visited Mnyakanya in 2018.

Despite an unscheduled pause in the project this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the legacy of the last four years continues. Since 2016:

- 70 used bikes have been refurbished and shipped to Mnyakanya High School with the support of University of Leeds Security and Sustainability and Cardinal Maritime.
- 80 new bikes have also been purchased and shipped through student and staff fundraising and The Bambisanani Partnership.
- Tools and consumables to the value of £10k have been provided, thanks to the support of the Rob Stephenson Trust and The Bambisanani Partnership.
- Over 120 South African children have been supported to learn to ride and maintain bikes.
- 59 University of Leeds and Leeds Trinity students and staff have been involved in the project.



Andrew Lockwood, who is now a Trustee of The Bambisanani Partnership, said: “Setting up the bike hub at Mnyakanya has been hugely beneficial to all involved, not only the recipients of the bikes, but also the university staff and students who are able to develop outstanding professional skills and personal values through this unique challenge. The hub is now clearly embedded at Mnyakanya and in the surrounding community and we now hope to expand the project to further rural schools in the area over the next few years”.

This initiative has clearly had a remarkable impact, both on those receiving the training and those providing the training. Andrew and the university teams deserve enormous credit for pioneering this inspirational work. It has been wonderful to see cycling introduced to this remote rural area. For the Mnyakanya students, and indeed in the wider community, we have seen a growing interest in cycling as a mode of transport, for sport, recreation, fitness training and, for some, a source of employment! There is a real desire in the community for this initiative to grow further and for it to be introduced in other countries. It really has been a tremendous success. ■

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David Geldart [afPE member] and **Suzzi Garnett**

David Geldart is the Founder and Chair of The **Bambisanani Partnership**. **Suzzi Garnett** is Sports Volunteering Officer at the **University of Leeds**. For more information, visit www.bambisananipartnership.org or contact d.geldart@bambisananipartnership.org