

Age Better in Sheffield
Learning Bite, June 2021

AGE BETTER
IN SHEFFIELD



Better Journeys - Of Trikes and Travel

Introduction

What is "travel"? A journey we make from point A to point B with a purpose in mind or that capacity for movement either in a vehicle or under our own stem to a place that isn't "home"? With Better Journeys, we've been talking about "active travel" for people aged 50 and over for 2 years now and a significant amount of that time has been overshadowed by travel bans and restrictions enforced due to the Covid19 pandemic. Many of the initial ideas to get people out walking or on the bus with a "buddy" had to shelved indefinitely, as did the independent travel training intended to help people gain confidence to travel on the buses alone. As people shielded, stayed very local and confined their movements to the essential ones only, the idea of promoting active travel for older adults became an increasing challenge. However, we know that the project coordinator Bluebell isn't someone who shies away from a challenge, in fact she is the kind of person who looks for the opportunities where others might see a dead end.

In summer 2020 when some of the lockdown restrictions were lifted for a brief period, and since April 2021, there has been a growing movement to promote the benefits of active travel and in particular to encourage cycling as a form of transport both for essential journeys and leisure. New cycle ways are being developed in towns and cities across the country and schemes exist which encourage employees to purchase a bike to use for travel to work.



Cycling without Age

Bike Week, which began some 96 years ago and is now delivered by Cycling UK, is an annual celebration which aims to demonstrate how brilliant cycling is. Their mission is to help people discover a passion for cycling and to join the thousands of people all across the UK who enjoy the simple pleasure of riding a bike. We have been working through Better Journeys to promote cycling among people aged 50 and over including those who may not have cycled for years or who have never cycled. Sometimes it's just a matter of regaining confidence and there are courses such as Bike Confidence run by Pedal Ready at different locations across Sheffield.

For older adults who, due to health or mobility issues, will be unable to benefit from getting on a bike, Cycling Without Age (which began in Copenhagen in 2012 as a non-profit global initiative) and now has “Chapters” all over the world in over 50 different countries, offers older members of the community the chance to be “piloted” by a rider in a specially designed tri-bike and still feel the wind in their hair. Each Chapter is run by volunteers with the guiding principles of generosity, slowness, storytelling, relationships and without age.

Better Journeys have now partnered with Cycling Without Age Sheffield, a partnership which was first envisaged back in early summer of 2020 but had to be put on hold due to the Covid19 restrictions. They have managed to secure the storage of the amazing Rhubarb, CWA Sheffield's electric tri- bike at a school in the Firth park area, so that local residents and those from other areas can be given the opportunity to take a piloted bike trip around Firth Park during early June 2021. For Bluebell the rationale for this is clear: Rhubarb offers very accessible active travel to older adults and even if that “travel” isn't in the traditional sense of getting someone from A to B it is still valid.



“Older people should be able to enjoy the bike experience even if they can’t cycle and getting people back out into the community to do something just for pleasure is incredibly important as we come out of lockdown”.

Of course, it is weather dependent, but blankets are provided for anyone who feels a bit chilly. The journeys can be tailored to the wishes of the individuals and the pilot can take into account how comfortable the person is feeling with the ride. At this time of year the Park is looking particularly beautiful and as well as encouraging active travel the partnership with CWA will also give people the chance to be back outside, enjoying nature:

“Seeing things from the different view point of the trike and literally getting “a breath of fresh air” after months of seeing only their own four walls. I am genuinely excited about seeing people in person and giving them something they will enjoy and benefit from. Finally, after joining this project at the time of lockdown and speaking to some of our beneficiaries by phone for over a year, I actually get to see people face to face. There has been a lot of talk about the take up of activities such as cycling during lockdown and now through this partnership we can bring a taste of that to people who would other wise not get that “wind in their hair” experience.” Bluebell

Bluebell herself has been doing more cycling than usual during this lockdown but she is now looking forward to the prospect of traveling further afield with her family to a holiday home on the Gower Peninsula in July.

“The Gower Peninsula is so beautiful and even though it’s a six hour drive it’s worth it. There is such a great holiday mood in the car that we don’t mind. My Mum, who is 60 now, used to go there with her family for holidays when she was a child, so we have a lot of history with this area. This year it will be all of us and the dog as usual and I’m really looking forward to it”.

In the meantime at ABiS we are all looking forward to getting down to Firth Park and trying the “Rhubarb Experience” for ourselves.

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