

National Free Bikes Network



INTRODUCING THE NATIONAL FREE BIKES NETWORK

A new collaboration of The Active Wellbeing Society, Active Essex, London Borough of Ealing, and Local and Combined Authorities are scaling up the highly successful free bikes schemes piloted in Birmingham, Essex, and Southall.

A gold standard evaluation of the free bike schemes will publish powerful data and evidence in October 2024. The new data will be shared for the first time at the National Free Bikes Network launch in Birmingham on October 8th 2024.

The mission of the network is to make cycling accessible by providing a free bike to remove the barrier of affordability. This will promote active travel and enable the creation of regular cycle habits. Participants get free, low carbon travel, which opens up pathways to jobs and opportunities.



Free bikes are also a “place-based” intervention to tackle health inequalities, promote cycle equity, and reduce physical inactivity as well as a way of enhancing active citizenship and boosting community cohesion.

The new National Free Bikes Network will:

- **Share learning** from three pilots on how to successfully plan and deliver a free bikes scheme
- Create a network of partners who want to **collaborate** to replicate the success of the free bikes schemes across all regions
- Help **secure significant resources** to fund a national scaling up of free bikes
- Create a consortium to purchase **bikes in bulk so that the most advantageous prices can be secured**, and the supply chain can be well coordinated to the benefit of partners
- Provide **a proven value for money evaluation framework** that measures impacts and benefits

What's been achieved so far

We've supported over 12,000 people to overcome the barriers to cycling, in partnership with Sport England and its Local Delivery Pilots, and organisations including the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, the NHS, and Local Authorities. This has enabled sustainable travel for those who are unable to afford their own bike. As a result of this, we have helped to build communities and make places more active, healthier, greener, safer, and better connected.



Our ambition is to scale and replicate the free bikes network across the nation, supporting local partners to enable more people and places to access the many benefits of cycling, for families and communities.

“
When you **remove the barrier of cost** by giving someone a bike, you enable a change in their behaviour and build trust. **It changes communities and shifts systems. It builds community resilience and changes the relationships from the ground up.**”



- Karen Creavin, Chief Executive
The Active Wellbeing Society

WHY FREE BIKES?

Benefits for Individuals

Free bikes mean that we can provide inclusive active travel for people who currently do not cycle because they cannot afford a bike.

Helping them to:

- Build self-confidence and pride in their community.
- Reduce loneliness and expand social networks.
- Increase active travel to school, shops, and work.
- Improve their physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- Improve access to employment and training opportunities.
- Save money on transport.
- Access cheaper food.



Benefits for places and communities

Getting more people cycling also brings significant community benefits, especially for the areas in greatest need:

- Removes the main barrier to cycling (affordability) in the most disadvantaged areas helping people get better access to jobs, training and services.
- Tackles health, social, and economic inequalities.
- Build community cohesion and create active citizenship.
- Increases transport equity.
- Supports local economies.
- Net Zero- helps lower carbon emissions through sustainable travel.
- Help to create healthier, greener, safer, and more active places.

System Benefits

- Connects Transport, Health, Place and Net Zero at multiple levels of governance.
- Attracts new investment from multiple agencies.



THE NATIONAL FREE BIKES NETWORK

The Free Bikes Network tackles inequalities and physical inactivity by providing a new bike to people who otherwise would not have had access to one.

The Free Bikes Network is national in its ambition but will be local in its delivery, meaning that we can co-create bespoke programmes for specific neighbourhoods and regional needs, while providing a platform for sharing insight and best practice to help accelerate partner delivery ambitions.

How it works:

- New free bikes are given to people who otherwise would not be able to afford to buy one themselves.
- The bike is loaned to participants for at least the first six months, during which time they need to use it regularly - bikes have an option of a GPS tracker.
- As long as they have used the bike regularly, the bike becomes the participants to keep after an initial loan period.
- Or if the bikes are used more sporadically, we work with participants to overcome barriers to motivation and usage.

National programme. Local focus.

We support people on their cycling journey with adapted bikes, if required, safety accessories, free cycle lessons, and free maintenance. We also inspire social networking and create pathways for continued engagement through local cycling groups and community events.

Delivery teams are recruited locally, creating employment and volunteer opportunities in the community. We work with cycling training organisations to teach people how to cycle safely and increase cycle confidence. We also deliver training and qualifications to help upskill local people.



National scheme

The National Free Bikes scheme builds upon three pilot projects—Big Birmingham Bikes (BBB), Active Essex – Essex Pedal Power (EPP), and Let’s Ride Southall (LRS)—with the following pages showcasing the impact each project has achieved to date.

“We aren’t just giving away free bikes; we are making a community stronger, healthier, and more vibrant. We offer those who may not have the same opportunities as others the chance to explore their local community, meet new people and access jobs and volunteer roles.”




- Rosie-Roella Kevlin,
Coordinator, Essex Pedal Power Clacton & Jaywick Sands.





“ It’s inspired a lifestyle change – it’s given me a new lease of life completely and I’ve met so many new friends, the community has gelled together. ”

(BBB recipient)

 **8,050** free bikes giveaway

 **13,126** adults & **54,946** children trained to ride a bike

 **82%** participants from top 20% most deprived (IMD 1&2)

 **673,930** miles cycled = 27x around the world


 **2,061** bikes fixed and owners upskilled in bike maintenance


 **26** self-run community cycling groups formed


 **130** tonnes carbon emissions reduced*

 **6 years** break even on phase 1 costs*

 **5,824** volunteer hours = £69,888 value (based on real living wage 2023)

 **78%** from BAME backgrounds

 **42** instructors & **88** ride leaders trained (58% from BME communities)

 **36** helped to gain employment through using their bike (23 directly in Bikeability)



Essex pedal Power



“ EPP has socially improved my life massively! I enjoy the group rides, I really look forward to them and they have greatly improved my physical activity levels. I’ve done 150 miles in a week, which is a huge achievement for me. I also feel really supported within the community. ”

(EPP recipient)



1,059
People have attended bike training sessions



1,866,622
total number of minutes spent on a bike
(equivalent to 2.7 years of continuous cycling)



502
Bike training sessions

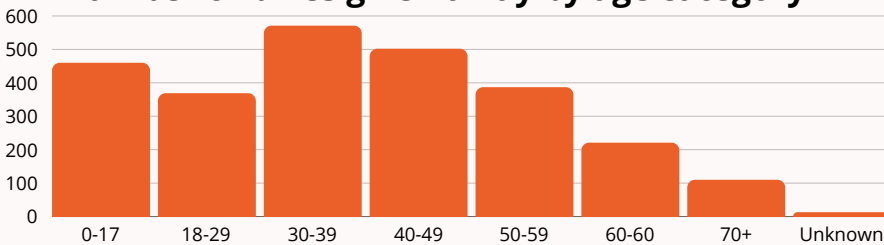


82
Led rides

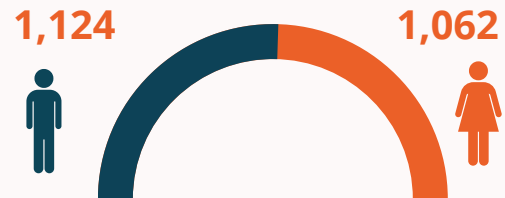


Logged by
72
Volunteers

Number of bikes given away by age category



Number of bikes given away by gender category

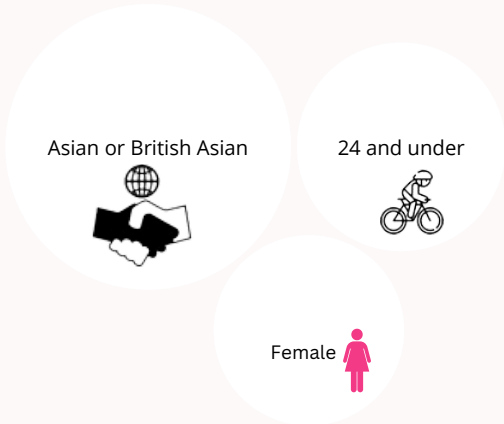


LET'S RIDE SOUTHALL

Let's Ride Southall is the biggest community cycling project in London and aims to build a social movement to transform Southall into a sustainable, healthy, and environment-friendly place.



2,100
unique participants



6 Local Cycling Instructors trained
18 Ride Leaders to lead bike activities



A PROVEN BEHAVIOUR CHANGE APPROACH.

Developing a new active travel habit is an important part of reducing physical inactivity and health inequalities. We have seen how our Free Bikes Scheme has led to behaviour change among participants. We work with the COM-B model as it provides an excellent framework for developing behaviour change techniques. It starts by looking at barriers and then considers whether individuals have the Capability, the Opportunity, and the Motivation to become more active and the interventions required to maintain new active travel habits.

This means that individuals have a free and healthy mode of transport to get to jobs, opportunities and services as well as connecting people to their local community. For people in areas with high levels of physical inactivity, deprivation and health inequalities, **this ensures that affordability is not a barrier to active travel.**

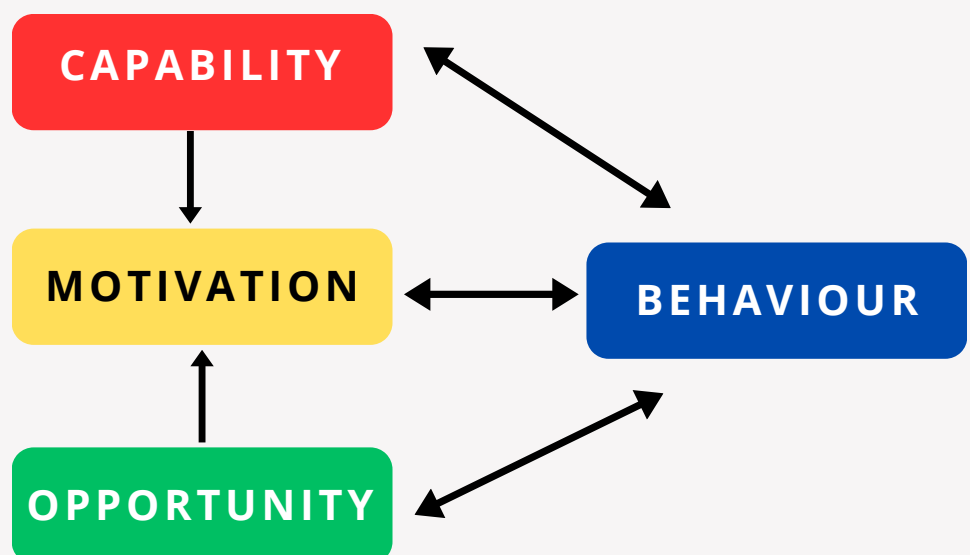
Active travel can then be incorporated into everyday routines so that cycling becomes a new habit, creating a pathway to behaviour change. At a community level, this leads to 'social knitting', participants become more active and socially connected, and often participate in other community activities thus reducing isolation and fostering increased civic agency.

The COM-B Model of Behaviour (Michie & West)

- Cycle Training/Bikeability
- Building strength and stamina
- Building cycle confidence

- Encouragement from Buddy's and Led Rides
- Joining a cycle community
- Incentives

- A free bike, helmet, and lock
- Community cycle clubs
- Information on cycle routes and networks

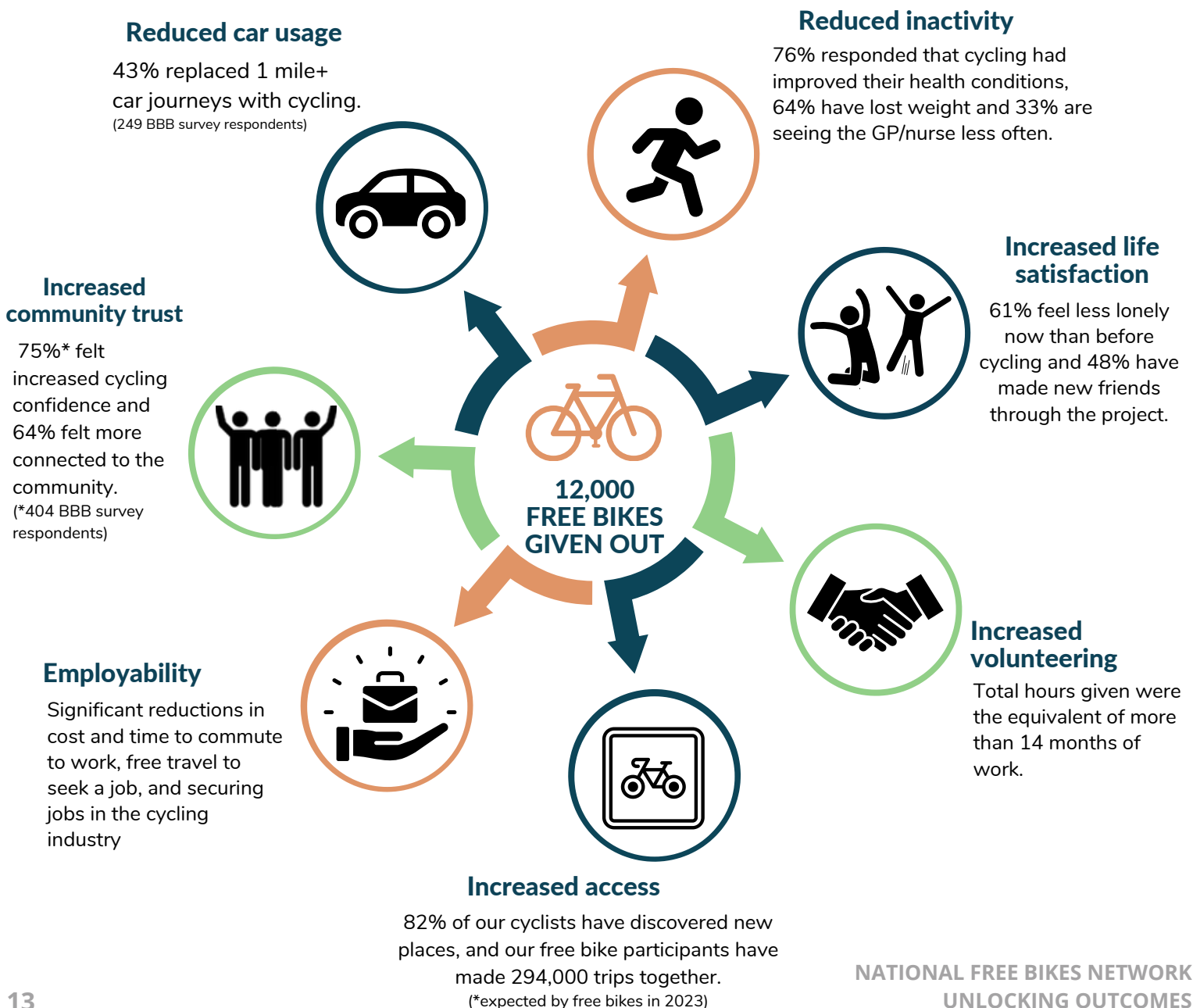


UNLOCKING OUTCOMES

Impact

The three pilots have delivered over 8,000 free bikes in Birmingham, 3,000 in Essex, and 1,000 in Southall to people who do not have the resources to buy their own and have increased active travel and community resilience.

We have collaborated with communities and many wider partners to tackle neighbourhood-specific issues, supporting multiple outcomes including improved health and wellbeing, social mobility, lower carbon emissions and economic growth.



JOIN THE NATIONAL FREE BIKES MOVEMENT

Our expert team works closely with partners to co-create and co-deliver free bikes schemes based on local needs.

The Free Bikes Network is able to provide support, advice, and services to organisations nationwide to help develop the capability required to get free bike schemes up and running as quickly as possible.

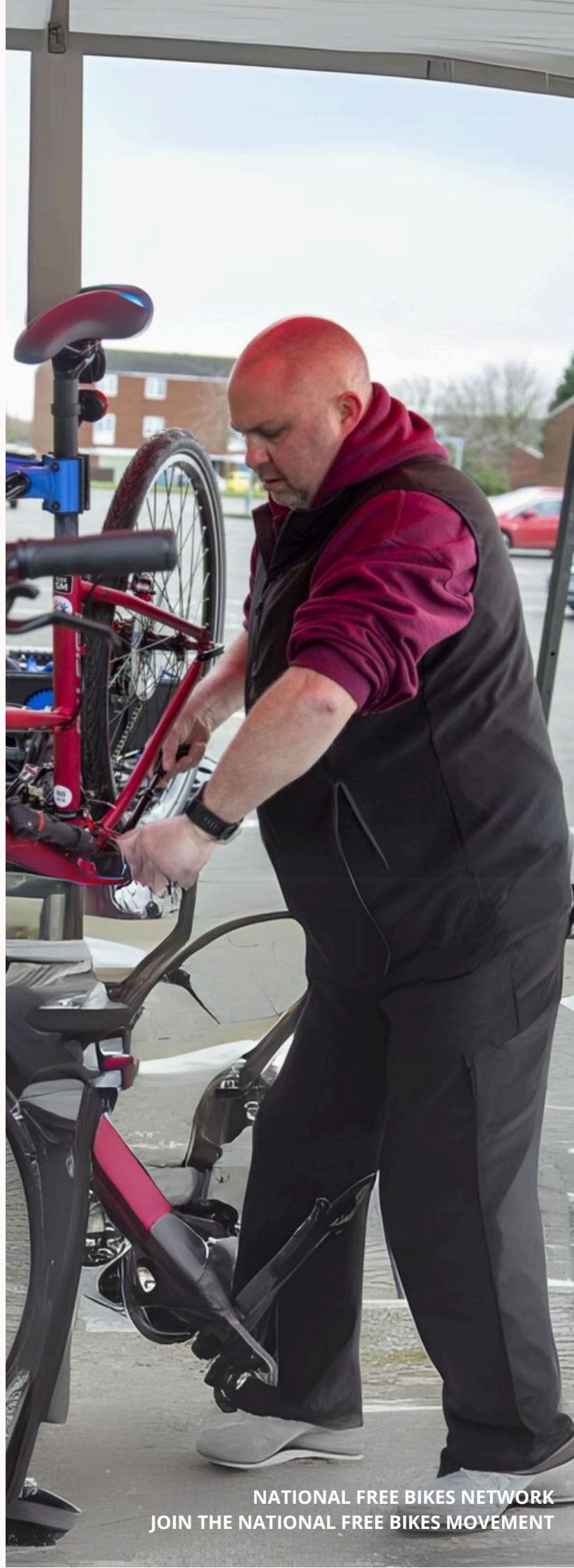
Our approach includes:

- Share learning of the current free bikes schemes.
- Network with our partners who are on a free bikes journey.
- Receive support and advise on project delivery including procurement and purchasing of the new bikes.
- Access training and toolkits.



We also support partners with:

- Sharing knowledge and expertise to enable timely activation.
- Procuring bikes (and trackers if required) at the best price.
- Leveraging knowledge and capability to create best practice in cycle training, support, motivation, and community co-production.
- Facilitating data collection to provide insight into scheme participants, physical activity, and transport habits.
- Providing expert support on developing capability, motivation, and behavioural change.



You can discover more about The Active Wellbeing Society by visiting www.theaws.co.uk

TALK TO US

The Free Bikes Network is changing lives and supporting system change for some of the most deprived areas in the country.

If you would like to find out more about how we can support you in developing a scheme for your locality, then please contact our **National Cycle Lead, Julian Sanchez** at:

✉ julian.sanchez@theaws.org

ABOUT US

The Active Wellbeing Society (TAWS) is a community benefit society and cooperative working to tackle inequality and promote community wellbeing. We collaborate with communities on their journey to better wellbeing, increasing social, physical, and civic activity levels through co-creation and innovation.

Our mission is to knit social connections and systems, build resilience and improve wellbeing in communities where inequalities are the highest.

We deliver a wide range of free activities and services aimed at improving wellbeing at an individual and community level. Our Free Bikes Network is just one of the programmes that we are experienced in delivering. We also work with partners on a host of community-based initiatives, from Community Cafes, Share Shacks, and Gardening Groups to Health Inequalities and supporting local food banks through our Food Justice Network.

In listening and understanding local needs, we collaborate with partners to deliver a holistic approach, knitting together a variety of community initiatives in order to support multiple outcomes.

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