

Comment & interviews

CYCLE SHORTS

THIS MONTH CYCLING UK'S BIG BIKE CELEBRATION IN BIRMINGHAM, CYCLING 'TUBE MAPS', AND MORE



(L to R) Stephen, Maria, Steven

Right: David Cook

Local Heroes

1st STEP BIKES

This bike recycling project in Scotland helps people recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. **Dan Joyce** found out how

FIXING BIKES CAN provide focus and purpose for anyone taking steps to recover from addiction. As well as bringing bikes back into service, the process helps get lives back on track. That's been the experience of 1st Step Bikes in Linlithgow, West Lothian, who were named joint Best Community Project in Cycling UK's 2016 Volunteer of the Year awards (see p10).

'Boredom and stigma are barriers to recovery,' said Development Manager Maria Throp. 'If you can offer activities that people can be proud to be involved in, and that also attract the wider community, you can promote understanding, good relationships, and real recovery.'

1st Step began as a community café two and a half years ago. The diversification into bike recycling was inspired by Angie Robinson, a Senior Community Mental Health Nurse in addictions.

'She knew a cycle mechanic who was trained while in prison,' Maria said. 'She was keen to tap into his skills and start a bike project.'

Enter Maria, who had set up a community bike recycling project seven years ago in Inverness (Black Ridge Bikes). 'We developed a six-week bike refurbishment course for people affected by addiction,' Maria said. 'Participants choose a donated bike and fix it up, one day a week. They can keep the bikes at the end, when we celebrate with a bike ride.'

Some have done up bikes for children, and we donated five to charity for Christmas.'

Many participants are referred by Angie Robinson. 'She has built up trust with the patients with addiction that she is caring for,' Maria said. 'And because they trust Angie, they've come along and given it a go.'

The initial attraction is getting a bike and the transport freedom it offers; most participants are on benefits or low wages. 'They stay because they are quickly engaged in learning new skills and in building up regular routines,' Maria said. 'They get peer support from our mechanics, Stephen McKnight and Steven Murphy, who mentor them as well as teaching them skills. And they have huge pride when they have completed their bike.'

That pride and sense of satisfaction is something that Stephen McKnight, who like Steven Murphy is in recovery himself, can relate to. 'Being involved in the bike project has given me something to focus on and to commit to, which has raised my motivation,' he said. 'It has reduced my social anxiety, through having to talk to the group and also one to one. I feel more confident. Helping others has raised my self-esteem.'

It's not just the participants who benefit. Police Scotland work in partnership with 1st Step, and Community Policing Inspector Scott Robinson said: 'The work put in by the team to gain the support of the local community, and the subsequent ongoing benefits for that wider community, are huge.'

Some of those benefits were realised in May, when 1st Step's two mechanics provided bike checks and repairs for over 25 people as part of Cycling UK's Big Bike Revival project. That was followed by 1st Step's first led ride – 'a lovely family event', said Maria.

1st Step are now developing a local cycling group, as they've been able to train three ride leaders and four first-aiders through their affiliation to Cycling UK. A move to bigger premises is also on the cards.

1st Step's Facebook page is: [facebook.com/1stStepCafe/](https://www.facebook.com/1stStepCafe/)

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