

Feeling lonely
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(Clockwise) Narinder, who learned to ride in 2018. Cycle training in Manchester. Ride leading in Sefton

Charity

CHRISTMAS APPEAL

Help break the cycle of social isolation. Donate now at cyclinguk.org/breakthecycle, asks James Newman

There's no doubt that 2020 has been hard for everyone. Every single one of us has felt the sadness of not being able to see a relative on a special day, missed hugging our friends or grandchildren, and had times when we were frightened about the future. For those of us fortunate enough to live with loved ones or friends, we can take some consolation that we've not faced these trials alone. But there are many who have had to face these dark months by themselves.

Feeling lonely can be as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and is linked to an increased risk of dementia, heart disease, anxiety and depression. With lockdowns and restrictions on movement, social isolation is another repercussion of the pandemic many are having to deal with.

Narinder's story

Narinder Kaur, from Walsall in the West Midlands, has been on the frontline as an

Intensive Care Nurse since the pandemic struck. No stranger to grief, she lost her father two years ago. She overcame her loss thanks in part to the support of Cycling UK's community work, through which she learned how to cycle.

"If it wasn't for Cycling UK helping me to learn how to ride a bike, I'm not sure how I would've coped after losing my dad," says Narinder. "It came at the right time because I couldn't stop thinking about my dad. But when I was learning to ride, I was having to focus on learning a new skill. It helped me move forward."

Living alone and working in the Intensive Therapy Unit (ITU) has taken its toll on her at times, often leaving her with no outlet or break. "Physically I've been well," she says. "As a nurse in ITU, it has been incredibly overwhelming and stressful. At times it was so hard, I was quite traumatised. When my colleagues and I were putting on PPE preparing to go on shift, we were just praying we would be okay, and we worried for our loved ones."

However, one thing that has helped her through has been the community she has found in her cycling group, which Cycling UK helped set up at the Walsall Arboretum.

"Sometimes you become vulnerable, because there's no one else to talk to – or people you do see don't understand you. So when the cycling group gets together, it's been absolutely amazing. The community cycling club is like family," Narinder says.

"As a nurse, I've still been going out and seeing people during the lockdowns. But you want to leave work behind and talk about simple things. I was getting out doing exercise alone, but you can only do that by yourself for a little while. You need that connection where you can talk to others."

Prior to the pandemic, social isolation was more prevalent in deprived areas, where it's accompanied by much poorer health outcomes. There's a gap of over nine years between life expectancy in the UK's wealthiest and most deprived areas.

And, tragically, it is these same areas that have been hit hardest by the pandemic, with death rates twice that of better-off areas. For some parts of the country – such as Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, and Belfast – lockdown restrictions eased for only a few short weeks. Millions will have been unable to see friends and family for many months.



“
I learned how to ride a bike in 2018 after losing my dad. If that hadn't come about, I would've struggled big time. I am very grateful to Cycling UK, so thank you.”

– Narinder Kaur

How your donation could help

Throughout Scotland and England, Cycling UK's community interventions are helping people like Narinder, providing a little bit of normality in this tumultuous time.

We are building networks, not just helping people cycle but also providing support, alternatives to public transport, and tackling social isolation. We are connecting communities, while also addressing the local needs that cycling can help to fix.

The groups and people that Cycling UK are helping are diverse: over 30% of people are from BAME backgrounds, with participants evenly split between men and women. And, although we didn't plan it this way, some of our strongest networks are in those places hit hardest by coronavirus, including Manchester, West Yorkshire, Glasgow, and the Midlands.

Within the constraints of a myriad of restrictions, our local development officers have worked throughout summer and into autumn to ensure those that need the support to keep cycling during the pandemic can continue to do so. We've adapted all the community groups and projects we support so that they have become fully social distanced and can support as many people as possible.



With more than 150 community clubs and individual projects, it has taken a lot of extra work and logistical wizardry, not to mention extra cost. But the results have been more than worth it.

We want to continue this vital work and do even more to help all our community clubs and projects. That's why we need your support with a donation this Christmas to help us in our mission. Your generosity can make such a difference to all those people suffering social isolation.

How to donate

- **ONLINE:** at cyclinguk.org/breakthecycle
- **PHONE:** by calling 01483 238 300.
- **POST:** send a cheque made payable to 'Cycling UK' to: Cycling UK, Parklands, Railton Road, Guildford, SURREY GU2 9JX, not forgetting to let us know it's for our Break the Cycle appeal.

Your donation

THE VALUE OF HELP

Your donation can help people like Narinder, who gives so much more back to her local community where she now regularly volunteers helping others discover the benefits of cycling.

£15

could pay for essential PPE, sanitiser and gloves to ensure bikes are safe for all to use



£30

could buy a waterproof jacket to help people ride during winter

£50

could provide a secondhand bike for a new cyclist



£125 could train a volunteer to lead group rides

