

If you build it, you can keep it

A unique project
is teaching
budding bike
mechanics

▶ By KIMBERLEY FEHR
PHOTOS: TIFFANY BROWN COOPER



Jordan Guy built his own bike in the Earn-a-Bike program. Now he helps other teens, such as Anna Lusk (left) and Anita Shen (below) do the same.

with a \$6,500 grant, was the first to support the pilot project.

“Often, philanthropic organizations like Vancouver Foundation have a reputation – a bit of cachet – so when somebody down the line is approached for further funding and sees the startup funding came from a place like Vancouver Foundation it makes it a lot easier, gives it some legitimacy.”

The program is now officially run by PEDAL, and this year it expanded with After School Bikes, which brings Earn-a-Bike on location to public schools, as well as offering an on-demand program to special interest groups. Meanwhile, the original Earn-a-Bike is still going strong.

Thanks to funding from the First Nations Employment Society, PEDAL hired Jordan as a summer employee for their Free Bike Program, which is recycling at its finest. The program refurbishes bikes using recycled parts and donates most of them to people who need them. In 2007, they gave away 269 bikes. Some of the bikes are also sold at Our Community Bikes, a store on Main Street run by PEDAL.

On average, Jordan builds two bikes every three days, as well as helping teach Earn-a-Bike.

“At first it felt weird because a little while ago I did the course and I knew nothing about bikes, and now I’m helping teach it. But it feels good,” he says. Having a bike means he gets a lot more exercise; he doesn’t really take cars or buses anymore. He has been to Stanley Park, and did the Critical Mass Bike Ride in June, where thousands of cyclists take over the streets.

“An easy sell for the Earn-a-Bike Program is kids like bikes,” says Bhimji. “The program helps kids who don’t have bikes to access one, and all of the benefits of cycling: the health benefits, the mobility and empowerment that comes from getting themselves around.”

Bhimji says Earn-a-Bike also gives youth a rare opportunity to work with their hands, learn mechanical skills, and use a different part of their brains than they normally use in school.

Recycling is another fringe benefit. Says program instructor Matty Semkowich, “They’re taking things that look like garbage and realizing that they are completely serviceable and taking pride in that.” **VF**

For more information about the Earn-a-Bike Program, visit www.pedalpower.org, or contact Vancouver Foundation at 604-688-2204 (www.vancouverfoundation.ca).

Sixteen-year-old Jordan Guy is trying to tame a squeaky wheel. His nemesis of the day – a black mountain bike he’s building – hangs suspended from a rack in the air at the PEDAL Bike Depot in East Vancouver.

“There’s one part of the brake that squeaks really bad,” he says with a shy smile. “That’s not supposed to happen. I did everything you can do to make that stop and it still does it. That’s taken up my whole day.”

Jordan swapped out the brakes, used steel wool to take a layer off the metal rim, and he is still flummoxed, but undeterred. “I’ll probably figure it out tomorrow,” he says.

A few short months before Jordan landed a summer job at PEDAL, he didn’t know much about bike mechanics. He didn’t even have a bike. Since January, when his family moved back to East Vancouver after a short stint in Port Alberni, he had been bike-less. A member of the Nuu-cha-nulth First Nation, he heard about the PEDAL Earn-a-Bike Program through a friend, and came along for the ride, “‘cause it’s not very often you get to go to a course for free.”

The premise of Earn-a-Bike is simple. Disadvantaged youth age 12 to 18 learn bike mechanics while refurbishing a bicycle, and after successfully completing the program and a safety inspection, they get to ride off on their own two wheels.

“The Earn-a-Bike Program aims to attract kids who wouldn’t otherwise have a bike – kids



whose bikes got stolen, kids whose parents can’t afford one, kids in foster care – and get them excited about cycling,” says Omar Bhimji, the program’s manager.

Earn-a-Bike began as a partnership between PEDAL, which stands for Pedal Energy Development Alternatives, and Trips-for-Kids, a popular program sponsored by the Grandview Community Centre Association that takes kids from low-income neighbourhoods on mountain biking adventures. Trips-for-Kids was looking to take its program one step further with Earn-a-Bike, and PEDAL and Bhimji came on board to start up and run the program.

Bhimji believes Vancouver Foundation,