

WALK IT. RIDE IT.



Fozia's story

Harehills

Fozia started hosting the ladies weekly 'learn to ride' group based at the Bilal Centre, Junior Sports Hub in Harehills. Her initiative 'Healthy HERhills' was set up for the women in the community to try new activities. When Fozia cycles in this group it reminds her of her days back in Pakistan, connecting to her roots, holding a special place in her soul.

My own experience of cycling has a very special meaning to me from when I was a child back in Pakistan. My dad had bought a bike each for both my brother and I, and mine was bright yellow. It was so beautiful, it was like I had a Ferrari riding around the streets where I live. All the other kids were amazed by it, they'd wave and come over wanting to have a go, it was very exciting!

Which is why I wanted to help host the women's cycling group. I wanted to create a welcoming group for these ladies to feel that sort of happiness, to learn how to cycle, and to have a place of their own where they could come together, learn a new skill and be part of a community. I didn't want it to be strict with policies for attendance. These women have busy lives and making it mandatory each week puts added pressure on their already busy schedules and creates a barrier to them actually turning up again.

We show them all the basic skills to start with, and build it up for each person. If somebody arrives one week and they have never ridden, or even sat on a bike before, then we'll go right back to the basics for them, so that they feel comfortable. I also help the ladies 'develop and nurture' their existing cycling skills.

There's still a taboo and stigma attached to seeing ladies in our community ride a bike. It's more often seen as appropriate for men to cycle. This is why it's so amazing to see these women learning together in a safe environment where they feel comfortable, they can wear their hijab and clip their garments back to pedal if they need to.

There are so many people who hugely benefit from the physical and mental wellbeing aspects that riding a bike can offer. To me, connection is very important and it's what I wanted to create with this group. More than anything I wanted to give these women an opportunity to connect with one another, to learn something together in a place where they feel safe, comfortable and valued. Some of the women here have no other family in this country other than who is at home with them, so the social connection is really important.



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I'A regular cycling group wouldn't reach the women in this community if they had to turn up at a park where men are present, or sign up beforehand to attend. Our group is really flexible and people don't need to book, they can just turn up when they want. The ladies can learn to ride indoors or take the next steps to cycle outdoors with qualified Cycle North coaches if they would like to.

When I cycle now in this group it reminds me of those days back in Pakistan, and it feels like a connection back to my parents who sadly are no longer with us. Cycling gives me a certain feeling of joy and calm, connecting me to my roots, it's a special part of my soul.

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