

## **Cycling: Group discussions with people in black and minority ethnic communities**

### **1 Background**

Newcastle City Council has secured funding to improve cycling infrastructure and introduce a complementary public health programme aiming to encourage people across communities to cycle. HAREF was commissioned by the public health team to facilitate discussions with people from minority ethnic communities, to make sure that the programme meets their needs, and to produce this report.

### **2 People who took part in group discussions**

69 people, 35 women and 34 men, took part in group discussions. The age range of both female and male participants was 16 to late 60s.

Eight group discussions were held with existing community and religious faith groups, involving people from the following communities:

- Chinese
- South Asian: from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, including people with first hand experience of migration, and people who were born and have grown up in Newcastle
- International student community: from Syria, Iraq and Libya
- African: from Algeria, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, Ivory Coast and Uganda
- Eastern European: Slovakian and Czech
- Western Asian: from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait
- Mauritian.

### **3 Experience of cycling**

In each of the groups there was a mix of people who can cycle, some of whom cycled as children, young people and students, and then stopped: "I did it as a girl and then no more", some who have kept on cycling, and some who have never cycled. A significant number of people have owned or own a bicycle: "Assembling the bike with your dad was a big thing". Several have experience of using an exercise bicycle indoors.

### **4 Things that would encourage / motivate people to cycle / cycle more**

#### **4a Outreach to existing community groups**

People across the eight groups said that they want support to cycle/cycle more. The preferred option, expressed in all of the discussions, is for a person with appropriate expertise to come out and offer a range of support to existing community groups, including confidence building for beginners, cycle maintenance sessions, and led cycle rides. One group of older people said that they do a lot of walking already and cycling will be more fun. The value of peer support in group cycling was highlighted by others:

- For our group it would be another way of socialising and having fun together.
- We would have a go at group cycling in the park for fun. If your friends do it, you'll do it, even if you're not keen at first and don't want to break out of your own routine.
- We would like it to be a female worker so that it is woman to woman. Our group meets on a Monday morning and that's a good time for us, when our children are in school.

- I'd do it if more girls cycled.
- A cycling group would link people in to lots of other things.

#### **4b Easy access to information about where to cycle safely**

People in almost all of the groups said that information about joined-up cycle lanes would encourage them to cycle:

- If there was a cycle lane I would jump on my bike

#### **4c A message about the health benefits of cycling**

Across the groups people agreed that it is good to cycle because of health benefits, and in several discussions the importance of highlighting this message was mentioned:

- This cycling project has come at the right time for us because there is a lot of stress caused by people having to apply for jobs and there aren't any jobs to get. Cycling relieves pressure that could turn in to depression.
- We've been thinking about cycling for a while, because we've been talking about what to do against obesity and diabetes.
- I'd love to cycle now. I'm a bit more health conscious. I cycled up to about 16 or 17, then it was cool to learn to drive, and now I need to be healthy again.
- If someone, a professional, comes in from outside we will take more notice and it can kick-start interest.
- It's about getting the message across and in to people's hearts and minds.

#### **4d A message about the economic benefits of cycling**

Similarly, people mentioned the importance of emphasising the benefit of cycling in terms of saving money:

- You don't have to use the metro.
- You'll save on petrol.

#### **4e The opportunity to explore**

People of all ages were enthusiastic about the possibility of travelling to places they have not been to before:

- You can learn about other places.
- You can see the landscape.
- I would like to go on longer trips, further afield.

#### **4f Bicycles for hire**

The value of the option to hire a bicycle was highlighted, for people who are not able to afford to buy one, and for people (who can afford to buy) to have a taster, as bicycles are an expensive investment. In several groups it was suggested that the hire of cycles could be discussed/planned/organised with community organisations, for example some organisations could host bike pools:

- People could have a taster session and try it out before they spend a lot of money.

## **5 Barriers**

### **5a Anxiety about road safety**

People across all of the groups said that they feel it is unsafe to cycle on Newcastle roads. This was mentioned by a significant number of adults in relation to their sons (though no reference to daughters). Some young women said that they think their parents might not

let them cycle on the roads because of safety worries, although they might be allowed to cycle in a group:

- I get my kids out on their bikes but we're restricted to where we cycle because it can be dangerous.
- I'm a bit scared to cycle on the road because I feel too exposed. I need reassurance that I'll be safe.

### **5b (linked to 5a) Interrupted cycle lanes**

Several men who cycle referred to interrupted cycle lanes as a barrier:

- Cycle lanes peter out, they just disappear.

### **5c Lack of knowledge about cycle routes**

There was a general lack of awareness of the current layout of cycle routes:

- I think there are some but I don't know where.
- If I had a cycle I wouldn't know where to cycle.

### **5d Lack of confidence**

Some women from south and western Asian, and eastern European, communities talked about having cycled as girls, and then not being able to cycle as adults in their countries of origin, because of what one woman described as "the cultural thing that women shouldn't be seen out on a bike". Another woman from a south Asian community referred to the shame of a woman showing her shape in public, also suggested as a barrier by several south Asian men. Despite this potential barrier for some women, the majority of women from south and western Asian communities who took part in group discussions said they feel very excited about opportunities to cycle and hope "that things will happen soon", although they know they will be lacking in confidence when they first try to cycle. They would feel comfortable starting off in group rides in a local park, which they described as "somewhere safe where you are comfortable to learn":

- Support to learn how to ride and look after a bike would build our confidence.

### **5e Embarrassment**

This was an issue for some of the young people who took part in group discussions, who expressed a fear of being laughed at:

- I would love to roam about on a bike but if I saw someone from school I'd be worried. They might laugh at you.
- When you're older you don't worry so much. Some of our teachers ride bikes to school.

### **5f Cost (money and time)**

The cost of a bicycle was suggested as a potential barrier to cycling, and bicycle hire was suggested, possibly with group discount. The risk and cost of having a bicycle vandalised or stolen was also mentioned. Some men referred to the perception that cycling takes longer than driving, though they thought that "people might find it quicker if they give it a go":

- Bike hire is about three times as much as it used to be (reference to Newburn) so if I go with the family it's too expensive. It's cheaper to take them out for a burger than to go cycling.
- People might invest in a bike if they can hire one initially to get going.
- I like cycling and I would cycle to school, but I'd hate to leave my bike on the stand because people might puncture or steal my tyres.

- If the council could provide or subsidise lock-ups next to community venues and places of worship that would definitely support people who want to cycle, because bikes are expensive.
- People wouldn't use cycles for work because there isn't enough time.

## **6 Access to information about activities in the city**

People across all eight discussions identified their group as their main channel of information about activities, highlighting the importance of the network of community organisations and faith communities across the city, with people getting encouragement to try things out as well as information: "Sometimes just getting the information is not enough". Participants said that they would like to get information about cycling support through their respective groups, and some offered to forward it on, for example through a school newsletter. Other sources of information that were mentioned:

- People always have a look in Citylife. It attracts people as they have good photos and sometimes it is people you know.
- Metro newspaper.
- Doctors and Health Visitors.
- Social media (mentioned only by young people).
- Spice FM (mentioned by south Asian men).
- Schools via children and grandchildren.
- Word of mouth within communities, including faith communities.

## **7 Silver Cycling**

This meant nothing to people across all groups. Several people asked whether 'silver' was a reference to cycling safety lights. Others asked if it was a brand name.

## **8 Cycling4Health**

This was easily understood as highlighting the health benefits of cycling. Some of the young people thought the text writing was patronising. Older people said that it gave a clear message, however images are needed to strengthen it: "You need a picture to make a point sometimes".

## **9 Extra information**

The following were mentioned during group discussions:

- West Jesmond primary school encourages ten minutes of cycling on the way to school each day.
- Cycle activity track in Heaton Park - the person who mentioned this is not sure if it is still there.
- Newcastle cycle hire scheme - some people have heard of this and want to know more about it.
- Bicycle recycling shops - reference to one in Byker (Recyke Y'Bike).
- Community cycling support worker employed by Steele's Cycles (South Gosforth).