

How Can People with Disabilities Live Their Best Lives? Through Adaptive Cycling

It might seem simple, but riding a bicycle isn't feasible for everyone. Adaptive cycling programs help people with disabilities live their best lives.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, UNITED STATES, August 30, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- "It's like riding a bike." We have heard the old adage time and again. Cycling might seem like a simple activity, but riding a traditional two-wheel bicycle isn't feasible for everyone. Bike riding for people with disabilities often requires specialized, costly equipment, and it's not always accessible, despite its physical and mental health benefits.



Envision Unlimited volunteer and member pedal paths, trails and roads together

But thanks to adaptive cycling programs across the country, including one offered through Chicago-based nonprofit [Envision Unlimited](#), people with disabilities can live their best lives more independently in their communities.

Physical activity benefits everyone. It [makes our muscles stronger](#), reduces our risk for various diseases, among other things. The benefits are even greater for individuals in the disability community.

According to the National Library of Medicine, neurodevelopmental disabilities, such as cerebral palsy and Down syndrome, have been on the rise in recent years. That means a greater chance for these individuals to develop chronic diseases early, especially if they're inactive.

Roughly 2.5 hours of exercise per week has potential to reduce these risks. And adaptive cycling specifically has been known to improve cognition and fine motor skills as well as reduce depression.

David Pufundt, an adaptive cycling expert with Envision Unlimited – a full spectrum of care organization serving individuals with intellectual, developmental and psychiatric disabilities – recalled his early days of cycling with client Geneva, who has a weakened cardiovascular system, asthma and no use of her arms or legs. Geneva rides in a Duet bike, which features a wheelchair in front of the tandem, while Pufundt pedals.

“When we started going over five miles an hour, she was almost gasping for air,” Pufundt said, noting how her lungs work harder to accommodate the change in air pressure. “Now, I can have a conversation with her at almost six, seven miles per hour.”

But despite its many benefits, adaptive cycling isn’t widely available for people with disabilities. That’s partly because the specialized equipment is expensive and often isn’t considered durable medical equipment by the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services and other insurance providers.

To overcome these challenges, Envision Unlimited launched its “Summer of Cycling,” a series of monthly cycling events to introduce the Chicago area to its adaptive cycling program.

“We have over \$40,000 in bicycles,” Pufundt said. “That gives a perspective of how much Envision is willing to invest in this experience.”

So far, Envision Unlimited has hosted four rides for its members (how they refer to clients with disabilities) and the public. The group even received a special invitation last month to tour the Bicycle Museum of America in New Bremen, Ohio.

The organization’s innovative adaptive cycling program creates new experiences for people with disabilities and empowers them to be more mobile, independent and out in their communities. What started as a donation of a few tandem bikes and a handful of Envision Unlimited members and community volunteers in 2017 has grown into a team of more than 100 cyclists.

In addition to the Summer of Cycling events, Envision Unlimited offers weekly bike rides on Chicago’s north and south sides. Nicknamed “Buddy Biking,” volunteers are paired with members, and they choose the type of bike they’d like to ride from the group’s impressive fleet. Some options include a traditional two-wheel bicycle, tandem bike, tricycle or Duet bike. Participants have already logged more than 2,000 miles this summer.

Since inception, Pufundt has watched members thrive in the program. One memorable moment took place during last year’s Fifth Third Bike the Drive, when Chicago opens its iconic DuSable Lake Shore Drive exclusively for bikes and bikers of all abilities. To get to the event, a member named Robert rode his bicycle from the South Side of Chicago to the downtown area, a distance of at least 10 miles, and arrived just after sunrise.

“It’s a really, really cool thing to see somebody that invested because it reflects that it’s significant

to them,” Pufundt said. “I don’t know another program like ours.”

Even with 2,000-plus miles in the books, these cyclists have no plans of slowing down just yet. Their Summer of Cycling season will culminate over Labor Day weekend with Bike the Drive, and Buddy Biking rides will continue through October.

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