



**FREEWHEEL**  
BY RIDE FOR FREEDOM

December 2023

# FREEWHEEL IMPACT REPORT



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The analysis was undertaken and the report written by Bethany Lee, MA International Relations and Security, University of Liverpool.

Research originator and funder

Ride For Freedom CIC, led by Gordon Miller

The research originator expresses its gratitude to the following organisations and charity partners who supported the delivery of the Freewheel programme during 2023:

Organisations:

Aviva

Biffa

Be First

Challenge-trg Group

Halfords

Orbea

Smart Solutions

TAV Systems

Vandome Cycles

Charities:

BCWA

Hestia

Medaille Trust

Migrant Help



# FREEWHEEL 2023 IMPACT

**13** participants expressed improvements across their lives.

**18%** improvement in participants' lives across three categories.

**9%** improvement in participants' cycling ability.

**2.5%** improvement in participants' physical health.

**6.5%** improvement in participants' mental health.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has evidenced the benefits of the *Freewheel by Ride For Freedom* programme for survivors of modern slavery. The programme provided the service users with a free bicycle and accessories, and cycling training to the national Bikeability standard. The participants answered survey questions before and after the hub sessions. Their responses were analysed in order to gauge the levels of improvement in their mental health, physical health, and general cycling ability, as well as the sense of independence and mobility achieved.

While there have been considerable existential challenges in 2023, as detailed in "Learnings", Ride For Freedom has continued to drive forward with its highly impactful Freewheel programme. The service users' improved mental health, physical health, and general cycling ability, the increased number of registrations to 36 this year, with 17 participants completing the Bikeability level training, and their positive feedback highly motivate us to develop and grow the programme into 2024 to continue to deliver Freewheel's uplifting survivor outcomes.

Gordon Miller, CEO Ride For Freedom

**"I FEEL MUCH MORE CONFIDENT ON MY BIKE NOW THAN I DID AT THE START OF THE DAY. THE CONFIDENCE IS GOING TO CARRY ACROSS TO OTHER ASPECTS OF MY LIFE."**

**FREEWHEEL PARTICIPANT N.K.**

# OVERVIEW OF 2023

Overall, in 2023, participants made an average improvement across the three categories (mental health, physical health, cycling ability), of 18%. The programme has made an overall improvement across the year, and has had a positive impact in all hubs – West Midlands: 24%, Barking and Dagenham: 20.5%, Northwick Park pop up: 7.25%,

The participants gave excellent feedback. One participant stated: 'I enjoyed a lot with all team members. It is brilliant day for my life. Thanks to everyone.'. Additionally, another said: 'It has really helped my confidence. Now I feel confident to change many things in my life for the better.'. This demonstrates the positive impact of the programme in real terms – the participants themselves see their changes in confidence and how the programme can help them in the long term.

## Cycling Ability

Cycling ability, across all three hubs, in 2023 improved by 9%. Experience and confidence equally improved by 20%, which underlines the link between the two. The frequency of how often the participants cycled improved by 40% demonstrating that the programme encouraged them to cycle more, and improved their relationship with cycling.

## Physical Health

Physical health across all three hubs in 2023 improved by 2.5%. Activity levels improved by 15% and how participants felt about being active improved by 10%. This underlines that learning to cycle can improve the physical health of participants, as well as their mental health and ability.

## Mental Health

Mental health across all three hubs in 2023 improved by 6.5%. Anxiety and stress levels improved by 15%, and participants stated they felt 10% calmer after completing the programme.



# LEARNINGS

- The Illegal Migration Act has caused changes to the Victim Care Contract which mean that charities are in a state of flux, with participants being transferred to other safehouses, and having to withdraw from the programme.
- Uncertainty creates a difficult environment for the programme to grow, and highlights the lack of control *Ride For Freedom* has as an intermediary partner.
- An almost 1:1 ratio of trainers to service users one session, meant that the participants had hugely improved results.
- Greater funding would enable an increased number of trainers, stimulating more dynamic sessions and more positive outcomes for the service users across the board.
- The participants all saw a big improvement in their mental health, demonstrating the impact of the programme on participants, and showing that cycling goes beyond
- The participants from the pop-up did not see the huge improvements in physical health that the other hubs saw, but this is
- The pop-up demonstrated that participants can still appreciate the improvements that the programme can make, regardless of the form it comes in.



# WEST MIDLANDS HUB

The West Midlands Hub had the biggest overall improvements in the participants, across the programme. Amongst the participants, improvements were made across cycling ability, anxiety levels, activity, and confidence.

Although the West Midlands Hub faced challenges, such as one session being cancelled due to service users being relocated, the Hub demonstrated the incredible impact that Freewheel can have on survivors. The session in July had a very positive atmosphere, as there were more trainers than usual, meaning that the service users got the attention and assistance they need to succeed in the programme.

## Findings

Across the West Midlands Hub, cycling ability improved across participants by 12%. This could potentially be down to the ratio of service users to trainers, which helped their abilities grow and change. More trainers stimulate increasingly dynamic sessions with more positive outcomes for service users.

The frequency of how often the service users cycled improved by 5%, demonstrating the impact of the program on participants. By learning how to cycle, the participants were able to have an alternative method of transportation.

The participants experienced a 25% improvement in anxiety levels, demonstrating that the program has a significant, positive impact on the mental health of participants. The participants also reported a 3.8% improvement in confidence when riding a bike, demonstrating how the programme has affected their calmness and ability across the board.

## Case Study

Participant 'NK' reported a 59% overall improvement across the three categories (mental health, physical health, cycling ability) after the programme.

NK's physical health and activity levels improved by 20%, demonstrating that despite their activity levels being high before, an opportunity to learn a new skill (cycling) has helped improve this further.

NK's cycling ability improved by 32%, and when asked before the programme began, they stated that 'I do not know how to ride a bike. I have not had the opportunity.' Their feelings towards cycling improved by 70%; their cycling experience level increased by 80%.

NK's mental health improved by 25% according to their survey results. Notably, when answering 'how are your stress levels when you're cycling?', NK improved by 80%. This is an excellent demonstration of the impact of the programme, as whilst NK's stress levels improved, as did their confidence by 80%. NK noted that: 'It has really helped my confidence. Now I feel confident to change many things in my life for the better.'

Overall, NK's results are a demonstration of the improvements seen across the board at the West Midlands Hub, particularly in the participants' mental health.

## Learnings

There are several learnings to be taken away from the West Midlands Hub. Firstly, the Illegal Migration Act has caused changes to the Victim Care Contract which mean that charities are in a state of flux. These changes resulted in some West Midlands participants being transferred to other safehouses, and having to withdraw from the programme. This is reflective of an overall state of instability due to the changes to the Victim Care Contract. This uncertainty creates a difficult environment for the programme to grow, and highlights the lack of control *Ride For Freedom* has as an intermediary partner.

Despite these challenges, there are also some positive learnings. The ratio of trainers to service users being almost 1:1 meant that the participants had hugely improved results, especially across mental health and cycling improvement. From this we can take away that greater funding would enable an increased number of trainers, stimulating more dynamic sessions and more positive outcomes for the service users across the board.

The participants all saw a big improvement in their mental health, demonstrating the impact of the scheme on participants, and showing that cycling goes beyond physical health and skill.



# BARKING AND DAGENHAM, LONDON HUB

The Barking and Dagenham Hub demonstrated great improvements in the participants, across the programme. Amongst the participants, improvements were made across activity levels, cycling ability, anxiety, and experience levels.

One area in which the Barking and Dagenham Hub had less impact was stress levels and the way that cycling made participants feel. This may be down to the reduced number of participants in the session, which meant that one participant will have a bigger outcome on the overall results.

## Findings

Across the Barking and Dagenham Hub, cycling ability improved across participants by 9%. Having fewer participants could have meant that there was a higher level of attention given to everyone by the trainers, helping them to develop and improve.

The frequency of how often the service users cycled improved by 5.5%, demonstrating that learning how to cycle meant that the participants had an alternative method of transportation or activity.

Additionally, the participants experienced a 2.5% improvement in confidence levels, and a 3.5% improvement in activity levels, demonstrating the connection between cycling ability and mental health. The programme allowed the participants to improve their cycling skills which in turn, developed both their confidence and their physical health.

## Case Study

Participant 'NA' reported a 27% overall improvement across the three categories (mental health, physical health, cycling ability) after the programme.

NA's physical health improved by 9%, with their activity levels improving by 70%, demonstrating the transformative ability of the programme. Their improvements in physical health and activity levels underline the impact that learning to cycle can have on the participants, beyond the development of a skill.

In saying this, NA's cycling ability improved by 9%, particularly the frequency in which they cycle improved by 70%. By cycling more often, this could potentially increase NA's level on independence, as their current methods of transportation relies on income.

NA's mental health improved by 11% according to their survey results. Notably, when answering 'How does cycling affect how anxious you are?', NA improved by 30%. This is another great demonstration of the impact of the programme, as whilst NA's anxiety levels improved, as did their activity levels by 70%. This by reducing their anxiety surrounding cycling, the programme helped to break down the barriers between NA and being physically active.

Overall, NA's results are a great example of the impact often seen of the programme on participants. Improvements in their mental and physical health, as well as their cycling ability – themes which are all connected. As participants' mental health improves, so does their physical health and cycling ability, which in turn help to improve mental health.

## **Learnings**

The Barking and Dagenham Hub is a great example of the work that can be achieved, and the improvements made across service users by the *Ride For Freedom* programme.

The participants' mental health, cycling ability and physical health all improved whilst participants came away with a new sense of independence.

The 50% drop out rate (number of registrants versus participants) meant that the service users received more attention from trainers, and were able to significantly improve their cycling skills.

# NORTHWICK PARK, LONDON POP-UP

The Northwick Park pop-up, which was designed with the ambition that by “taking the session to the service users rather than asking them to travel would encourage participation”, demonstrated improvements across the service users who particularly experienced uplifts in cycling ability and mental health.

## Findings

Across the participants, cycling ability improved by 4%. Given that this was a pop-up, this may be why the improvements are not as dramatic as the rest of the hubs.

The frequency of how often the service users cycled improved by 17.5%, whilst the service user’s confidence levels improved by 10%, underlining that the participants felt reinvigorated by the programme. Cycling ability and mental health are increasingly connected across the programme, and this hub certainly demonstrates that.

## Case Study

Participant ‘ES’ reported a 16% overall improvement across the three categories (mental health, physical health, cycling ability) after the programme.

ES’s mental health improved by 12% whilst participating in the session. ES experienced equal improvements across anxiety levels, stress levels and calmness, improving by 30% in each. This demonstrates the great impact that the programme can have, even in just pop-up form.

ES also made a 6% improvement in their cycling ability, particularly improving by 40% in how often they cycle – demonstrating again the link between learning how to cycle, transport independence and improvements in mental health.

Overall, ES’s results are how the programme can make improvements, even in pop-up form. The connection between ES learning to cycle and their mental health is evident, as is the frequency of cycling and levels of independence.



## Learnings

Learnings from the Northwick Park pop-up can be taken in many forms. Firstly, it's important to note that in pop-up form, the results seen in the participants do look very different to those in set up hubs.

The participants did not see the huge improvements in physical health that the other hubs saw, but this is not to undervalue the improvements made across mental health and cycling ability.

The pop-up demonstrated that participants can still appreciate the improvements that the programme can make, regardless of the form it comes in.

**"A.I.A IS SOOO GRATEFUL FOR THE FREEWHEEL COURSE AND THE GIFT OF THE BIKE. HE'S ACTIVELY GOING OUT FOR 2-3 HOURS EACH DAY FOR A CYCLE. SO LOVELY TO SEE WHEN WE SEE /HEAR SUCH DIFFICULTIES OUR CLIENTS EXPERIENCE. MAKES A HUGE DIFFERENCE AND HAS SUCH A POSITIVE IMPACT."**



## **Modern Slavery**

“The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;” (Palermo Protocol, 2000).

## **Active**

Within the context of this survey, active refers to the amount of physical activity the participants generally partake in, whether for enjoyment or to improve their mental and physical health.

## **Transport Independence**

Within the context of this survey, transport independence refers to how much the participants rely on others for transport to go about their daily life.

## **Mobility**

Within the context of this survey, mobility refers to the participants ability to go where they want, when they want to.