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# Bicycles and Youth: Impacts

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Bicycles and Youth:  
Impacts

by  
Elizabeth Drews

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Social Work  
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
in Partial fulfillment of the requirements of for the degree of  
Master of Social Work

Committee Members  
Michael Chovanec, Ph.D. (Chair)  
Ericka Otterson, MSW  
Erin Young, former Full Cycle mechanic

The Clinical Research Project is a graduate requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University- University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee, and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project and publicly present the findings of the study. The project is neither a Masters thesis nor dissertation.

A special thanks to Erin and Ericka, who were beyond gracious and helpful throughout the process, to Ka'mel for his perpetual positivity, and Ben, for helping me find myself when I needed direction. Additionally, the researcher would like to thank the Thursday Night Friends, for countless encouraging texts and many hours of post-class meetings.

**Abstract**

Previous studies considered the factors leading or discouraging youth to use bicycles as a means of transportation or exercise. The purpose of this study was to consider the impacts of community based bike programming on youth of color and/or from lower income communities. The researcher interviewed four people who are in some capacity involved with bicycle programming aimed at youth. The interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed. Initial themes arose among all participants, including the following: Early Experiences and Family Influences, Community Involvement, Knowing and Preparing for Target Populations, and Skills and Pride. Implications for social work practice and suggestions for future research are discussed.

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### **Introduction**

Kie, a ten year old, fourth grade student living in a south Minneapolis neighborhood, spent most of his time at home with his mother and maternal aunt when he was not attending school. His father was not a present figure in his life. Kie presented as having anger-related issues, often responding aggressively when things did not go his way. Kie began biking from his house to school regularly during his fourth grade year; he lived close enough to his school that he did not qualify for bussing, but his mother worked early in the morning- she was frequently unable to bring him to school. His bike, which he had gotten from a neighbor, proved to be a benefit- he was able to ride to school and around his community. Eventually, Kie approached after-school staff, asking to start a bike program. Here, he was able to learn basic bike repair skills, connect with other youth who shared similar interests, and build positive relationships with staff within his school (Lorna Lewis, personal communication, 2-17-2017).

Students like Kie, coming from low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, often face many barriers, including historical and ongoing discrimination. They often lack transportation to their schools, which are often underfunded. They are also often unable to attend after school programming, which has been linked to higher academic achievement (Grogan, 2010). After school programming, especially for students in these communities, can help students build additional supportive relationships that help students make academic gains, and develop skills that will be helpful when or if they attend college (Leach, 2007).

In lower-income neighborhoods, barriers to physical activity exist. Current recommendations suggest that youth exercise for roughly 60 minutes daily, but only 42% of children and 8% of adolescents actually meet this standard in the US (Hoffman, 2013). Research

shows that exercise has similar physiological benefits for adults and children- lower blood pressure, improved cholesterol levels, and enhanced heart and lung function are just a few benefits (Hoffman, 2013). Additionally, physically activity has been linked to improved academic achievement and fewer depressive and anxiety related symptoms (Hoffman, 2013). Youth who commute by bike at least once per week tend to have healthier body weights and have lower risk of early death (Hoffman, 2013).

Barriers to transportation also exist in lower-income communities. Expenses related to cars and public transportation adds up quickly. Additionally, public transportation is very time consuming- it often takes significantly longer in many urban areas, including the Twin Cities, to wait for busses than it does to bike. In lower-income communities, public transportation often does not run as frequently or have as many stops as compared to wealthier neighborhoods (Condron, 2012). Bicycles can help to provide a work around for expense, while providing transportation. Gas, insurance, or the ever-rising costs of bus fares are not a concern. Bicycles can also offer a feeling of independence versus being reliant on a ride (Hoffman, 2014).

Bicycles are important for social work with youth for countless reasons. Community-based and after school programming has been linked to academic growth for low-income students and students of color. The National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics stresses the importance of challenging social injustices, human relationships, and service toward others. Bicycles, in challenging social justice, can help to overcome barriers to transportation, while providing exercise to youth. Chaufan notes that, "The health of children living in poverty is particularly threatened by obesity, with the prevalence of obesity-related conditions, such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, further exacerbating socioeconomic and racial inequalities in children's... health" (Chaufan, 2015, p. 6). Around human relationships, bicycle

programming in communities and schools often requires an adult from an organization to be present, as well as other youth with whom they can build community. Involvement in outside of school time (either community-based or after school programs) with a caring adult has shown to help youth make academic gains.

The purpose of this study is to explore the impacts, positive or negative, that bicycles and bicycle programming can have on youth. The research question is, “What are the benefits and challenges of implementing a bicycle program for youth in lower income communities?” The researcher will address the question through connecting with program leaders who are already involved with youth-serving bicycle programs, potentially including programs in schools and community-based organizations.



### **Literature Review**

This study will consider the impacts bicycles and community or school based programming can have on youth between ages 12-18, with a focus on youth coming from lower-income communities and communities of color. The literature found primarily seems to focus on how bicycles can be used as a tool for transportation and fighting obesity and other serious health concerns associated with lower income communities. The researcher will also include information on community and school-based programming in the greater Minneapolis area.

### **Poverty and Impact on Children**

The United States' poverty guideline for a family of four is \$23,050, with the median household income of \$50,054 (Breslow, 2012). According to the 2011 Census, roughly 16.4 million youth in the United States were living in poverty (Breslow, 2012). Roughly 4 million of those youth are black, and 5.5 million are Hispanic (Mccartney, 2011). 47.6% of children in poverty live in a home headed by a single female (Breslow, 2012).

Families in these situations, as a result of their economic status, often are faced with many other barriers, including limited access to transportation, physical activity in safe outdoor spaces or time with caring adults while their parents are at work (Hoffman, 2014; Leventhal, 2010).

### **Health Benefits**

Living in urban areas has been associated with less physical activity and more sedentary behavior in youth (Hoffman, 2014, p. 301). Physical activity can decline as much as 50% throughout middle and high school years, with between 50-92% of youth not meeting national guidelines of 60 minutes of exercise per day (Zarrett, 2014, p. 86). This is an issue, as inactivity,

that comes with time in schools and jobs where physical activity is excluded, can lead to serious health concerns. Inactivity causes between six and ten percent of cases of heart disease, type two diabetes, breast and colon cancers, that kill roughly 5.3 million people per year (Walker, 2017, p. 11-12). Bicycles used for transport could significantly raise activity levels (Zarrett, 2014, p. 86). Youth who commuted by bicycle felt they were more in shape for other sports they participated in at school (Orsini, 2006, p. 126). Zarrett's study, that focused on outside-of-school time athletic programming, found that youth who participated in athletics for two years or more gained more health benefits. Additionally, sports, "culture," encourages non-athletic after-school programming to increase engagement in healthy behaviors for youth who are traditionally at a higher risk for a life-long trajectory of obesity (Zarrett, 2014).

Physical activity, such as cycling, can help to provide both physical and mental health gains. This can include lower blood pressure, better cholesterol and glucose levels, and enhanced heart and lung functioning. Youth who are active tend to have increased motor skill competencies, fitness, muscular strength and endurance and higher bone densities. Additionally, people who are physically active tend to have a lower BMI. Physical activity has also been linked to enhanced cognition through improved memory and can promote the development of executive functioning skills (Hoffman, 2014; Fuller, 2013). This is especially important while working with homeless youth, who often experience higher rates of depression, anxiety and other mental illnesses (Forge, 2012). It has also been suggested that people who cycle regularly are more likely to remain active and independent later in their lives (Walker, 2017).

## **Social Supports**

Studies have indicated that having active peers and encouraging and supervising parents is associated with greater physical activity. One study found that for each extra hour spent outside during the weekends, was linked to an extra 27 minutes of exercise during the week (Hoffman, 2014). Earn-A-Bike programs, like the program described in Hoffman's study, provide urban youth with opportunities to participate in physical activity and build an active social network (Hoffman, 2014). Orsini's study followed several youth in British Columbia; most of the youth followed in his study indicated that their parents frequently modeled cycling as a regular part of their lives- whether they use bikes to commute, run errands or family trips, or went on bike tours (2006). Students who actively biked to school often did not identify as bicycle advocates, but would often encourage their peers to bike to school; several students offered to help repair their friends' bikes (Orsini, 2006).

## **Transportation**

Many lower-income families are often unable to afford cars or public transportation- gas, maintenance and insurance are often too expensive, and continually rising fares are often unaffordable (Hoffman, 2016). U.S. Census data from 2008-12 show that roughly .6 percent commute by bicycle, but people making less than \$10,000 per year commute at a rate of roughly 1.5 percent (Hoffman, 2016). Monthly maintenance of bicycles, without major malfunctions, can cost almost nothing (Hoffman, 2016). Several shops in Minneapolis and St. Paul, including Venture North and Cycles for Change, offer Bike Library and Open Shop programming, that loan bicycles long term and provide tools, can help overcome barriers around these potential expenses (D. Otte, personal communications, 16 March 2017; A. Magill, 17 March 2017).

Youth who bike regularly as a means of transportation were more able to do things independently, including going their friends' houses, their local parks or running errands for their parents (Orsini, 2006). However, studies have indicated that youth who live within three miles of a dedicated bike lane are more likely to bike to school than those who do not (Walker, 2017).

### **Barriers/Associated Risks**

Several barriers to cycling appeared in literature. First, many youth noted that were concerned about their bikes being stolen, as many spaces do not have adequate bike racks or storage (Hoffman, 2016). Several authors indicated that accidents or fear of injury were a concern (Passafaro, 2014). Longer distances, adverse weather (including rain or snow), and crime were also areas of concern (Barriers, 2002). Youth also noted that cycling can be time consuming and that their time is already constrained- they are often faced with homework and other school or community based activities.

Many people who are more upwardly mobile who commute by bicycle often see bicycles as a choice, and a source of pride. However, youth of color who grow up in poverty tend to see bicycles as a necessity only when they are out of money. These youth often strive to get out of urban poverty; their goal is often to save enough money for a car to help facilitate their escape from their situation (Hoffman, 2016). Youth of color who come from places of poverty are less likely to use bicycles, as a result.

Additionally, bike lanes tend to come while a neighborhood is being gentrified. Many inner city neighborhoods attract younger professional type people who are attracted to the idea of being able to walk or bike to their workplace. Unfortunately, by the time bike lanes arrive, many

less wealthy people will have left the neighborhoods, as they are unable to afford the ever rising rent (Walker, 2017).

Youth of color, too, might worry about being targeted because of their race. Hoffman describes a situation in which several bikes were stolen from a Detroit suburb. Several youth of color were then questioned by police around the thefts; however, several white youth biked past and were not stopped and questioned (Hoffman, 2016).

### **Creating Community through Programming**

In, *Bike Lanes are White Lanes*, Hoffman describes Milwaukee's Riverwest 24 annual event, and how its organizers work to build community (Hoffman, 2016). The Riverwest 24 is a twenty-four hour bicycle event that "...was born through community block watches throughout Riverwest (a neighborhood in Milwaukee). It is a way for our neighborhood to welcome new people, strengthen relationships within the community (and beyond), and show everyone why Riverwest is amazing. From riders to volunteers, organizers to community sponsors, everyone brings a different talent and interest to the table. There is no way a few people talking about a bike race in their back yards could have come up with something like this," (Riverwest 24 Hour Bike Race). The event was, "...born out of this dynamic of defending a neighborhood while celebrating its quirks and independence from mainstream society," (Hoffman, 2016). Events like the Riverwest 24, which encourage intentional interaction between participants who might not normally communicate helps build relationships (Hoffman, 2016). The event's organizers encourage community members to get involved in whichever ways they are able or willing, and often prioritize neighbors who do not identify as bicyclists (Hoffman, 2016). Hoffman suggests

that events like Riverwest 24 could be used as a tool to build community, and engage people from different backgrounds with bicycles.

### **Current Programming in the Midwest**

Within the Midwest, there are several community-based agencies that work with youth from low-income and/or communities of color. Full Cycle, Venture North, and Cycles for Change are based out of the Twin Cities.

Full Cycle aims to, “connect with and support homeless youth, our community and our Earth through bikes, business and relationships” (Full Cycle). Full Cycle works to provide paid internships, a food shelf and free bikes primarily for street-dependent youth. Their internships require a 10 hours a week for six months commitment. During that time, the youth will learn basic business skills and learn bicycle mechanic skills, and eventually work in Full Cycle’s bike shop. Full Cycle also provides street-dependent youth with an opportunity to build a free bike in their shop, using their tools, with donated parts. In partnership with one of their sponsors, Pillsbury United Communities, they are responsible for a youth-specific food shelf (Full Cycle). Full Cycle is a program under Pillsbury United Communities who aim to, “work with underestimated populations across Minneapolis to foster the resilience and self-sufficiency of individuals, families, and the community as a whole” (Pillsbury United Communities, 2016). Full Cycle offers roughly 16 internships to homeless or highly mobile youth per year, while providing 250 bikes through their Free Bike Program per year to youth who otherwise could not afford one (“Full Cycle: About Us).

Venture North aims to create, “economic, social and environmental value... providing youth with economic, and educational opportunities while keeping bikes out of the landfill and

encouraging the development of an empowering and healthy community in the Harrison neighborhood of North Minneapolis” (Venture North). Venture North employs nine people, four of whom are mechanics, while the other five work as baristas or work to provide community outreach. Venture North provides apprenticeships and Earn-A-Bike programs for teens. Additionally, each youth apprentice is involved in a cascade mentoring program- they help to support younger youth in bike camps, STEM classes and Earn-a-Bike classes (Venture North). Over a year, Venture North has seven youth apprentices who learn and work under mechanics. Over 100 youth are involved with their Earn-A-Bike programming (Pavek, 2017). Youth involved with the Earn-A-Bike program is a summer class that serves youth ages nine and above; youth learn to build and maintain bicycles in a youth-led environment while learning about community responsibility and respect (Venture North).

Cycles for Change (C4C) aims to, “build a diverse and empowered community of bicyclists. C4C implements a variety of programs that support people in getting access to a used bicycle, free bicycle repair... and other opportunities to help grow a broad-based equitable bicycling movement” (Cycles for Change). Cycles for Change has locations in south Minneapolis and St. Paul, where they are able to provide bike maintenance classes, open shop nights where community members can fix their bikes, bike riding classes and classes aimed at teaching street skills. Additionally, they offer open shop nights aimed specifically for people identifying as women, transgender or femme, on Tuesday nights (Cycles for Change). Their youth apprenticeship program serves 20 youth for at least 250 hours over a year, starting in early June 2017, and ending in late May 2018. Last year, their apprentices reached 150 adults and children, working to share the skills they learned around using bicycles as a tool for economic advancement and alternative transportation (Cycles for Change).

Rez Cycle aims, “To create access to transportation, and self empowerment while building a safe bicycle community for Native American Reservations across the continent” (Rez Cycle). Rez Cycle began in the summer of 2015 on the White Earth Reservation in northern Minnesota. Rez Cycle is a community-based bike shop that partners with the Boys and Girls Club of the White Earth Nation to provide free or low-cost bicycle repair, Earn-a-Bike programming, a Native Youth Bicycle Council, and bicycle safety and advocacy groups. Rez Cycle targets youth ages 8-18. Programming primarily happens during summer months. Approximately 40 youth are involved in summer programming through group rides and maintenance classes (Rez Cycle).

The Bike Sharks After School Bicycle Program at Seward Montessori was founded, in part, to serve youth who normally would not have access to bicycles. The program was started by a teacher who, inspired by her own love of bikes, recognized that many youth in her school did not even know how to ride. She learned that there was a fleet of bicycles available within the school district; normally, this went to gym teachers, but she soon realized that she too could use it for after school programming. Through her programming, the teacher was eventually able to take the youth involved on group rides, which eventually inspired parents to start riding their bicycles more often, as well. This program developed relationships with other community agencies, including Cycles for Change and Free Bikes for Kids, who were able to donate bicycles to their program for youth in need (Herr, 2017).

### **Caring Adults**

A single parent heads many families in lower-income communities. Single parents time is often stretched thin, often with financial stressors causing additional burdens; often, parents in



these situations have a harder time meeting their children's needs (Leech, 2007). Community-based programming helps to allow extra community involvement for youth coming from single-parent homes. Community-based programming can help provide youth with additional caring adults, while teaching them skills that could be useful in their future.

### **Youth Bike Summit**

In March of 2010, Recycle-A-Bicycle, a community-based bike shop based in Brooklyn, attended the League of American Bicyclists' National Bike Summit in Washington, DC. Two youth interns accompanied them, and became interested in how bikes could fit into community building, policy, the environment and social entrepreneurship. As they spoke on the bus ride home, they recognized the importance of engaging youth in national conversations around cycling advocacy and education; the idea of the Youth Bike Summit was created. The conference aims to transform, "...local communities and strengthen our national movement by empowering bicycle leaders." The conference recognizes the importance of youth-led workshops, working with youth from diverse backgrounds, and the idea that when youth ride bikes, communities are healthier and more sustainable (Youth Bike Summit).

### **Gap in Literature**

The researcher consulted with a librarian at the University of St. Thomas library to find resources around bicycles, community building and youth. While there were many articles around the benefits of exercise and community-based programming, there is limited information specifically around bicycles and youth existed in the literature. The researcher used the following databases while searching: PsychINFO, Social Work Abstracts, and SocINDEX. Search terms included, "homelessness," "youth," "bicycles," and "bicycle programming."

**Summary**

In conclusion, the research shows that bicycles have shown to have stigma attached, but also that bicycles can be tools for transportation, improving physical and mental health, and, when paired with community partners, can help youth build self-esteem, freedom, confidence and pride. Bicycles can even help to build communities. Bike lanes have been linked to more cycling for youth and their families; however, by the time bike lanes arrive, many lower-income families have been forced out of these neighborhoods as they can no longer afford to live in these spaces.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The researcher will focus on the Ecological Theory, which was developed in part by Urie Bronfenbrenner, who recognized that, "...influences take place when individuals and groups of individuals interact and directly affect others who exist within the same environment, as well as those who are in larger environments influence and are influenced by members on the immediate or focal setting" (Forte, 2007, p. 134). The ecological model was chosen, as it provides a wide lens to explore the impacts of community based bicycle programs on youth.

### **Levels of Intervention**

The immediate setting, or *micro* level, "includes systems such as home, the classroom, and the neighborhood in which a person develops" (Forte, 2007, p. 136). This could include Kie, from the case study in the introduction, within in his family structure and connections to his bike. Several questions in the interview will focus on how bicycles can impact a youth individually, but also within their neighborhood system.

The *meso* level, "is a system of relationships between two or more intermediate settings"; this could be Kie and his interaction with afterschool bike programming, adults leading programming and other youth involved (Forte, 2007, p. 136). Several questions in the interview ask about adults involved in youth work.

Finally, the *macro system*, "refers to the consistencies... that exist at the level of culture and ideology, including values, laws, and customs," (Forte, 2007, p. 137). This would include Kie's fit within the Minneapolis bike culture. Several questions in the interview are around bicycles fitting into the larger community.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

The literature review shows that, while there is limited research on the impact (positive or negative) on youth, bicycles, especially when paired with afterschool programming or parental involvement, can have positive impacts on youth.

This qualitative research project considered the impacts of bicycles on youth, and adults that work with them. Because qualitative studies, "...seek to represent the complex worlds of respondents in a holistic, on-the ground-manner," the researcher thought it would work well to gain a better understanding of youth workers' relationships with youth in their communities, as well as the other people involved in bike programming (Padgett, 2008, p. 2). Most of the previous research involved connecting with bicycle-related organizations that served youth, potentially including Full Cycle, Venture North and the Minneapolis Bicycle Coalition. Most programs offered an incentive, such as earn-a-bike programs or job-training and/or mechanical skills. This project will add to existing research by considering how bicycles impact youth's transportation, self-sufficiency and physical health while also considering barriers that youth face.

### **Population and Sample**

Convenience and snowball sampling were used. The researcher is connected to many people who work in youth-serving bike shops and after-school programs within the Twin Cities and beyond. Many of the researcher's initial contacts pointed them to additional contacts they had. Initially, the researcher reached out to shops with which they already have established relationships, including Full Cycle, Cycles for Change, and Venture North Bike shops, as well as

Mr. Michael Recycles Bicycles. They connected with staff from various community and school related bike programs. Additionally, the researcher connected with school-based programs, such as programs that exist through Minneapolis Public Schools. People included in the sample worked with bicycles for at least six months and have contact, through their work, with youth on a regular basis.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

The researcher primarily connected with adults linked with community-based and school-based bike programming for youth. Participants in the study were asked to complete a survey around their experiences with bicycle programming with youth in their organizations. The surveys will be between 15-25 questions. An informed consent form was provided with the surveys. The informed consent forms described the risks, benefits, and a note indicating that people were not required to participate. Additionally, it described how the data collected in surveys or interviews will be transcribed, and that their information, including names and other identifying information will be kept confidential. The researcher's contact information was provided in the Informed Consent form, so the participants could contact the researcher with questions as they arose.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher initially connected with their committee members, asking for connections that they already had. The researcher then connected with their contacts, as well as with people in the cycling community and in after school programming within the Twin Cities area. Five interviews were then conducted.

**Researcher Bias**

As someone who has facilitated after school programming within Minneapolis Public Schools, uses their bike as a primary form of transportation and has numerous friends involved in the bicycle industry within the Twin Cities area, the researcher has a bias towards the positive impacts of bicycles in the lives of youth. To better address bias, committee members reviewed interview questions.

**Instrument**

The survey consisted of nine questions; it considered basic demographic information, including age, and race. It also asked how long the subject had been involved in their program, as well as working with bicycles. It asked them to explore their introduction to bikes, as well as other relevant experience to youth programming they might have. The survey also asked about how they saw youth who bike impacting their community, family and bikes on themselves. (See Appendix 1.)

## **Findings**

### **Sample**

Fifteen people were asked to participate in the study; four people responded in the designated timeframe. Interviews were conducted between March 15 and April 18, 2017. Three people work in community-based bicycle programs, either as mechanics, community outreach or shop managers. All of these have regular contact with youth who participate in their program. One person works in a school, by day as a teacher and by afternoon in their afterschool bike program. All of the respondents identified as white. The respondents had a range of working with youth and bicycles; one person started their programming roughly one year ago, where others had been working within the industry for 6, 7, and 15 years. They all worked with youth in some capacity throughout their careers before becoming involved with bicycle programming.

### **Themes**

Transcripts were reviewed for the four participants that generated the following themes. The researcher identified 4 main themes throughout the interviews: early experiences and family influence, community buy-in and involvement, preparing for target population, and skills and pride. There were additional themes for each question, including for-profit experience, and appreciating non-profits. The following section will describe in greater detail the themes found in research; quotes will be italicized. Each major theme had arisen in at least two interviews.

#### **Early experiences and Family Influences**

When asked about how and when they first started becoming interested in bicycles, three respondents noted that people in their immediate and extended family helped them to find their

first bikes. Previous research indicated that youth who have parents or other adults in their lives who model cycling as part of their lives are more likely to use bicycles as a means of transportation or see cycling in a positive light (Orsini, 2006). One person mentioned that his mother would frequently bring home bikes from yard sales.

*My mom would always buy these bikes from yard sales. I'd fiddle with them and make them better. One time, when I was 13, I took my bike to a shop and a mechanic helped me fix my bike. I've been hooked ever since. (Participant 3, page 2).*

Another person spoke of his first road bike he received from his uncle.

*I had a mountain bike like every other kid in the '90's. But when I went to the University of Iowa, bikes were cool. I got this road bike from my uncle, and became interested in learning. I was eventually able to work with a bike library on campus; I got excited when I was able to, "free the bikes," that were abandoned on campus. I've been working, in some capacity, as a mechanic ever since. (Participant 1, page 1).*

### **Community Involvement**

When asked, "What would you recommend to people attempting to start their own bike program," each respondent indicated that community involvement and buy in is key when implementing a bike program aimed at youth. Research suggests that cycling related programming can help people become more connected with their community- programs like Full



Cycle connect youth with youth-led food shelves and other needed services (Full Cycle). One respondent indicated that it is important to engage with the community to see what they expect out of a community-based bicycle shop or space. One respondent noted the following:

*“When we opened our shop (in North Minneapolis) it seemed like a good idea, something cool. But there was a disconnect; the community’s expectations were different than what we were, and it sort of alienated folks. A \$250 refurbished bike seemed expensive, compared to a brand new bike at Target... but we’ve tried to reach out in different ways. We have continued our youth engagement programs- we have interns in the summer through Step-Up. And we help facilitate programming with Nice Ride (a program that rents bikes by the half hour). People can participate in summer programming, and eventually get a \$200 certificate for a bike at Venture North. It’s been huge; it allows people a low investment, try it out period.” (Participant 1, page 2-3).*

### **Knowing and preparing target populations**

Each of the respondents noted that knowing about their target community was key. Each program tries to serve youth who are underserved or do not have regular access to bicycles. Full Cycle, Spokes and Venture North are able to provide bikes to youth through Earn a Bike or similar programming, while the Bike Sharks are able to, “borrow,” bikes from a bike library program within Minneapolis Public Schools. A participant noted:

*Which youth do you want to have this opportunity? It’s important to remember that some kids might already have bikes and be active, while there are some families who’ve*

*recently immigrated. It's important, too, to consider the needs of those kids without access. It's key to consider, too, who's showing up, and make programming relevant to them. (Participant 2, page 2).*

### **Skills and Pride**

When asked, “How can bicycles impact youth as individuals, in their families, and in their greater communities?” the respondents noted that youth are often able to learn hard and soft skills, including basic bicycle maintenance, which can lead to developing focus, and eventually feelings of pride and accomplishment. Bicycle programming can get youth on bikes, which can lead to greater independence, while they become more able to transport themselves.

*“I just, you know, I want to bike with my kids. It was really stepping outside the box and trying something different with my kids. I knew they'd learn something different, like the soft skills we don't directly teach in schools, you know, like focus and feeling that sense of accomplishment of working together as a group.” (Participant 2, page 2).*

## **Discussion**

### **Sample**

Three respondents work at shops in the Twin Cities area, while one ran an afterschool bike program. Because they all have stake in a bicycle shop or program, they tended to have mostly positive things to say about their and other community programs, as well as the greater cycling community. Each person self-identified as white, and cis-gender. There is limited research on how cycling impacts people from other communities, including the LGBTQA or communities of color. There are fewer people from these communities within the cycling communities; as a result, there are significantly fewer people from these communities in leadership positions who could be interviewed for this research project. Potential participants were initially emailed.

### **Themes**

Early experiences and family influences came out as a theme both in respondents as well as in the literature. Orsini's research indicated that youth whose parents modeled cycling behavior were more likely to cycle themselves (Orsini, 2006, p. 124). Three of the respondents noted that they had family members who, in some way, introduced them and hooked their interest on bicycles.

Community involvement was important while considering bicycle programming within the Twin Cities. Many of the programs aim to help meet needs of their communities, whether needs are bicycle related or otherwise- Full Cycle and Venture North both aim to provide job training to youth. Additionally, Full Cycle also provides a food shelf for youth served (Venture North; Full Cycle). They aim to help provide spaces for people to learn mechanic skills, create

safe spaces and help people learn about a relatively sustainable form of transportation. The respondents noted, too, that community involvement was important for them.

The theme, Knowing and Preparing for Target populations, came up while considering programming that already seems to exist within the Twin Cities, but did not appear as frequently in other literature. A lot of the other literature found did not focus on bicycle programming, but rather on why youth did or did not bike (Hoffman, 2016; Walker, 2017).

Pride and Skills appeared in each interview, however in a different way. The respondents who worked in shops seemed to focus primarily on, “harder,” skills, like learning basic bike maintenance skills. The respondent who works as a teacher seemed to appreciate that her students, through bicycle programming, were able to learn softer skills, like focus, determination, and eventually a sense of accomplishment and pride around learning how to ride and fix their bicycle. This theme did not appear as often in literature. However, barriers to using cycling as a means of transportation was common, but was not discussed by all of the respondents. While one respondent noted that one of the youth she served, on a group ride, wore only flip flops, and that several of her youth did not own their own bikes, barriers were not as common with the other respondents.

### **Researcher Reaction**

The researcher, while conducting the interviews, thought the respondents were all relatively interesting people. Despite the fact that their programs were similar, each respondent seemed to bring their own personality into running their programs successfully. Three of the respondents are currently employed at agencies that combine bicycles and youth, so their enthusiasm and biases for this research was apparent. The researcher, through the research, recognized the importance of face-to-face contacts with agencies

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

There were several limitations to this research, including a small sample. In regards to having a small sample, the researcher contacted several people who did not reply to initial contacts. As most of the research was done in spring, and many of the people contacted work in the bicycle industry, primarily at shops, their shops were getting progressively busier, so they might have had less time to participate in the interview process. The researcher recommends following up with twice with potential contacts to ensure that they have ample opportunity to participate, as well as connecting face-to-face, if at all possible. Additionally, an online survey that could have been completed as potential respondents had time might have led to more respondents. Further research should also explore in further detail more of the impacts that community based bike programming could have on youth.

### **Implications for Social Work Practice**

Implications for Social Work Practice could include encouraging clients to use cycling as a means of exercise, transportation and a potential means to building community. People who are already involved in bicycle programming who have had influential figures in their life introduce them to bicycles are more likely to positively introduce bicycles to youth they are connected with, whether in their personal or professional lives. They are more likely to recruit people to work within their program or agency. Additionally, programs that already exist could find ways to provide evidence of feelings of pride, growing self-esteem and maintenance related skills, as a means to show value to their grater communities. Group rides could be facilitated during group times to promote exercise and to raise awareness of communities.

**Conclusion**

This study aimed to consider the impacts that bicycle related programming could have at youth coming from low-income families and communities of color. While bicycles can be used as tools to build community and healthier lives, there are certainly barriers around them that need to be addressed before programs can be successfully put in place. The researcher was able to connect with people who currently work with bikes and youth in various capacities. Themes that arose included Early Experiences and Family Influences, Community Involvement, Knowing and Preparing for Target Populations, and Skills and Pride. The researcher hopes that the link between those passionate about cycling and working with youth can be further articulated.

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## **Appendix A: Informed Consent**

### **ST CATHERINE UNIVERSITY Informed Consent for a Research Study**

**Study Title:** Bicycles and Youth: Impacts

**Researcher(s):** Elizabeth Drews, BA

You are invited to participate in a research study. This study is called Bicycles and Youth: Building Social Connections. The study is being done by Elizabeth Drews, a Masters' candidate at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, MN. The faculty advisor for this study is Michael Chovanec, Associate Professor, at the St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work.

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the impact of bicycles and bicycle-related programming impacts youth, ages 12-18. We will be interviewing staff of youth-serving bike programs to better identify the benefits and challenges of implementing these programs with youth. This study is important because not a lot of research has been done around bike programming and youth. 6-8 people are expected to participate in this research. Below, you will find answers to the most commonly asked questions about participating in a research study. Please read this entire document and ask questions you have before you agree to be in the study.

#### **Why have I been asked to be in this study?**

You have been asked to participate in the study because you are involved in some capacity with a program that serves youth and works with bicycles.

#### **If I decide to participate, what will I be asked to do?**

If you meet the criteria and agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do these things:

- The researcher will provide you with interview questions and a consent form. You will be asked to review both and sign the consent form before participating in the study.
- The researcher will conduct an audio-recorded interview with you, going over the questions distributed prior. The interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes.

In total, this study will take approximately 45-60 minutes over 1 session.

#### **What if I decide I don't want to be in this study?**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide you do not want to participate in this study, please feel free to say so, and do not sign this form. If you decide to participate in this study, but later change your mind and want to withdraw, simply notify me and you will be removed immediately. Your decision of whether or not to participate will have no negative or positive impact on your relationship with St. Catherine University, nor with any of the students or faculty involved in the research.

**What are the risks (dangers or harms) to me if I am in this study?**

There are minimal risks associated with this study. However, negative comments about your agency could get back to a supervisor. The researcher will, in all written documentation, assign a pseudonym to each participant. The researcher will keep information gathered confidential. Participants will also be offered off-site interview space that is secure and confidential, such as a conference room in a public library.

**What are the benefits (good things) that may happen if I am in this study?**

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study. Indirectly, you will be helping to provide important information to better help other professionals in their work with youth.

**Will I receive any compensation for participating in this study?**

You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**What will you do with the information you get from me and how will you protect my privacy?**

The information that you provide in this study will be kept private. The audio recordings will be transcribed, and names will be removed from all data. The researcher will keep the research results in a locked file and only the researcher and the research advisor will have access to the records while they work on this project. The researcher will finish analyzing the data by May 31, 2017. The researcher will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you. Only the researcher and research advisor will have access to the audio recordings; the recordings will also be deleted on May 31, 2017.

Any information that you provide will be kept confidential, which means that you will not be identified or identifiable in the any written reports or publications. If it becomes useful to disclose any of your information, the researcher will seek your permission and tell you the persons or agencies to whom the information will be furnished, the nature of the information to be furnished, and the purpose of the disclosure; you will have the right to grant or deny permission for this to happen. If you do not grant permission, the information will remain confidential and will not be released.

**How can I get more information?**

If you have any questions, you can ask them before you sign this form. You can also feel free to contact me at [drew0026@stthomas.edu](mailto:drew0026@stthomas.edu). If you have any additional questions later and would like to talk to the faculty advisor, please contact Professor Michael Chovanec at [mgchovanec@stkate.edu](mailto:mgchovanec@stkate.edu) or at (651) 690-8722. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739 or [jsschmitt@stkate.edu](mailto:jsschmitt@stkate.edu).

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I consent to participate in the study and agree to be audiotaped.

My signature indicates that I have read this information and my questions have been answered. I also know that even after signing this form, I may withdraw from the study by informing the researcher(s).

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Signature of Participant

Dat

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Signature of Researcher

Date

**Appendix B: Interview Questions**  
**Biking and Youth: Building Connections**

This study will consider the positive and negative impacts that bicycles and bicycle programming can have on youth coming from lower-income communities.

Instructions: Please review these questions, and bring to the interview meeting.

1. What is your age?
  
2. What is your ethnicity?  
 Black  
 White  
 Latino  
 Other
  
3. How many years have you worked with bikes? (In the bike, “industry,” or community based bike programming?)
  - a. 1-3
  - b. 3-5
  - c. 5-7
  - d. 7 or more
  
4. How did you first develop an interest in biking? How did you get involved in the bike community and industry?
  
5. Why did you choose to work at your organization? What related experience did you have before coming to your current agency/organization/program?
  
6. What impact do you see bikes having on youth...
  - a. ...as individuals
  
  - b. ... in their families
  
  - c. ...in their greater communities

7. What would you recommend to people attempting to start bike programming in the future?
8. What do social workers and/or other mental health professionals need to know about bicycles or bicycle programming that might be helpful to their clients?
9. Is there anything else that you feel might be helpful?

Thank you so much for taking time to complete these questions!