

Momentum Magazine

[Mighty Riders Launches Cycle Back Program](#)

by [Gail Kirkpatrick](#)

05/07/10 4:45 PM

Amy Walker

Instructor Geoff MacDonald teaches students of the Cycle Back Program how to overhaul cranks and bottom brackets.



By Gail Kirkpatrick

For most of us, cycling is a conscientious choice to self-propel for health reasons or because of our concern for the environment.

For people living on the street, a bike is a place to store personal items, it is a mechanism of commerce, moving bottles and cans to a refund depot and, on occasion, it may even be a way to escape violence.

In Vancouver, where one in six people walk or cycle to work, where there are 400 lane-kilometers of designated bike routes and where dozens of cycling subcultures exist, cycling, bike ownership and bike repair have come together as a way of getting off the street, as well as a way of managing it.

Last December, Vancouver's Lookout Society, an emergency aid society, put together a program – in cooperation with Mighty Riders cycle shop – called Cycle Back. The program teaches up-to-date technical bike repair skills to those who may have been homeless or at risk, but who are now in transition, either getting ready to leave a shelter or having just moved back into their own living space.

Six students began the program in April, another six are set to start in May and seven more are on a waiting list. Of those who have completed the program so far, two are now employed. There are four positions waiting to be filled.

"I have stores ready to employ workers who finish this program," said Ed Luciano of Mighty Riders. "Owners trust that I will send them capable and ready-to-work employees."

Luciano converted space at his shop to incorporate a workshop/classroom, designed the course, and said there is enough money to get through the first two years of the program.

The seed money for Cycle Back came from the Olympic Legacy Program through the City of Vancouver. So far, there are eight partners, including the City of Vancouver, the Mt. Pleasant Community Association, the Bicycle Trade Association of Canada and Norco.

Robert MacDougall of Lookout noted, "Part of the success of this program is screening candidates who are suitable and willing to commit to such a program". To that end, Lookout has also partnered with BOB (Building Opportunities for Business) to help screen candidates.

Applicants' reading and education levels, as well as any disabilities, need to be considered, but for those who get through the program, this work may be a way back to self-sufficiency. The income they earn after graduating and securing a job as a bike mechanic could also provide the allowable income supplement to those on disability pension.

Lookout Society runs a two-year multi-tiered transition program for those with barriers to work (85 percent of those are related to mental health issues); last year, they managed to help 20 people turn their lives around. Obtaining employment is one of the last steps in shelter transitioning.

"Fiddling around with bikes requires attention to detail," said Luciano. Sometimes this kind of attention to detail can help move the focus from personal problems to project dynamics and can assist in motivating clients to stay healthy and show up for class.

Cyclists experience the benefits of riding every day – focusing, pushing beyond personal limits, reaching a destination or spending the day with a supportive group of people. The Cycle Back program gives participants the ability to experience the benefits of work and find a way off the street.

mightyriders.ca | lookoutsociety.ca