

people and places pedal power

What could a school caretaker, a retired insurance claims officer, 5 Zulus, a corporate financier and his family, a village elder, a working mother and a human resources executive possibly have in common?...Bicycles that are helping a community at work and play.

The Bokamosa bicycle project works with the people of Mapoch – a rural, economically poor community north of Pretoria South Africa where unemployment is nearly 80%– it was the brain child of a school caretaker who had been matched by people and places to volunteer in the community training local youth in basic property maintenance.

"I read the report of a previous volunteer, who said that the residents of the village spend nearly a day walking to the doctors and back. I am passionate about cycling I knew quite a bit about cycle charity projects so we worked together designing a cycle repair maintenance and sales project for the village.



The idea was to introduce bicycles and therefore cheap transport. During the month I was there we turned a grocery shop run by Pastor Peter into a cycle shop, built some bicycles from spares and renovated some donated bicycles We bought some spares to sell and we built a cycle trailer from plastic waste pipe and cycle wheels. I had two local previously

unemployed youths working with me and I gave them and Peter some basic maintenance training.

The difference a bicycle can make is amazing. I was told about a district nurse who visited her patients on foot and saw eight patients a day but after being given a bicycle she can visit 18 patients. We have ensured the Bicycles will be maintained and we have created

employment for the villagers and they will have cheap transport - for some of the children this will mean they do not have to spend hours each day walking to school. I'm working with people and places now to promote this project, because although I know I have left a couple of trained people in the village, it is very important that they are supported and the training is reinforced." Nigel school caretaker and volunteer 2007

In 2008 Nigel's work was built upon by various volunteers including Charles, a retired insurance claims officer, who won't see 75 again!

" I don't know if anyone in South Africa heard Norman Tebbit tell the unemployed in the 80's to get on their bike, but it has occurred to at least three people and I found myself volunteering to work on making bicycle trailers and repairing cycles. The concept being that cycles can give poor people the mobility to widen their search for employment and if they have a trailer they can move bulkier loads .The other thought is that in building trailers and repairing bicycles a few unemployed young men could learn a skill which they could exploit to start a small business." Charles retired insurance claims officer and volunteer 2008



Charles worked with a team of 5 local men – all of whom were previously " unemployable"

"This old white man has done what other people of my own colour refuse to , he has given me the chance to learn to work with my own hands. My own people laugh at me when I "get fits" and would never give me a chance to work. I wish he could stay longer and teach me more skills then I could save my disability grant to buy tools and be able to start my own repairs workshop" Nathi - an epilepsy sufferer

" please organise more people like Charles. Our village will be the best around here. People envy us because we have a white grandfather. Just be careful when you work with him, he gets cross easily. Just the other day he screamed at me Marcus for not doing what he wanted. But we love it because he teaches us." Aaron- never worked before



Whilst Nigel was there, an opportunity arose to source nearly 400 bikes from a UK charity. Mike a co volunteer and a corporate financier offered together with his family to help with funding the shipment – but where to store them?...in the container of course - but this doubled the cost – the volunteers and local people rallied together and raised the extra needed– it was all frustratingly slow but a year after Nigel and Mike's family visit the container hit the water and 2 months later it was greeted at Mapoch.

"From a twenty thousand feet perspective it was an incredible learning experience for me. Prior to Mapoch I had struggled with what role I should play in volunteerism. Warren Buffett had said the greatest good is for him to just do what he is best at (which is making money) and then just donate that money to charity as his contribution to society. I am certainly no Warren Buffett but his recommendation had motivated me to contribute money rather than time in the past. This fundamentally changed for me when I went to Mapoch and worked side by side with Pastor Peter" Mike Corporate Financier and volunteer

1 Naboth's Nursery, Canterbury Road, Faversham, Kent ME13 8AX
tel +44 (0) 8700 460 479 | email info@travel-peopleandplaces.co.uk

“The bicycle project is something else all together! People for the first time aware how disadvantaged they were transport wise. With bicycles they can now afford to visit, shop and travel to those places that were out of reach to them. Some are already thinking of running businesses with their bikes delivering bread, milk and meat. Parents are enquiring about how they can get hold of bikes for their kids because the kids want bikes to get to school.”
 Pastor Peter village elder and leader of the Bokamoso Bicycle project.



The impact that the bicycle project has already had in the community is huge. Old bikes are suddenly being repaired as spares can now be bought locally. Second-hand bikes can be purchased at prices well below normal retail prices. Local entrepreneurs are able to run small businesses by using a bicycle to deliver goods locally with the support of a cost effective bike-trailer that is manufactured locally! Children are being transported to school and patients to the nearest clinic

"We have just come back from the village and on the way there we bumped into David carrying fruit, veggies and water on his trailer. He says that he has managed to put two 50kg packets of cement on the trailer. That is 100 kg that he has transported successfully. His little transport business is really going well and he says that he makes about R80 (£5.50) a day from transporting and selling things! He says that Christmas is going to be good this year as he will be able to buy a sheep! We have put Peter's mobile number on the trailer and we are getting so many calls to make trailers that we have to start looking into make a few soon." Marnie working mum and people and places local partner in the Mapoch volunteer programme

The bike project isn't just about work – it's about leisure too....activities we take for granted –



“The bike track that I left behind has the potential to be a great resource – for children playing, for teaching, for sport and exercise and for competition and community events. As it is also right beside a football field, it could become a proper sports centre. I would have concerns that it won't necessarily be maintained and finding a way of instilling pride in the area would be really great so that people don't throw rubbish, rake it occasionally and so on. I would also run regular events there, like the one held on my last day. We just did cycling races, but there is the potential for a full sports day. Please try to ensure good crowd control and that cyclists wear helmets!!!The safety training that we developed could also be furthered – either by building on the materials, and when confident, taking some people out onto the road for real experiences with the road signs, traffic and so on.”

Emma Human resource executive and volunteer

“Emma set up a cycle track as part of her tasks at Bokamoso and we held an opening event to coincide with the opening of the Beijing Olympics! The track is about 270m and is situated next to the soccer field up at Peter's shop. We had a great turn out with about 100 people all together (40 cyclists and the rest spectators”

Marnie

In November 2008 5 cyclists who won their races at this event were entered into the Johannesburg Mountain Bike challenge – all of them finished within the top 200 of a field of over 1200! it was the first time anyone in the village had ever competed in any national event.

“The guys had decided not to wash their bikes immediately

– between the medals and the mud, I am not sure which was worn with more honour!”

Marnie



people and places co founder Sallie Grayson visited Mapoch in February 2009 and took pictures - the bike programme is working and is real –

“it's so hard for so many volunteers they visit for a month or two and do not have the opportunity to see that their work is of huge benefit and is being built on.”



“Thanks so much for sending the pictures. It really warms my heart to see that the bicycles are making a difference in Mapoch. I hope that it can grow with time to have even a greater impact on the community. Our family feels a strong connection with the friends that we made there. Your travel service is really wonderful for connecting people from all over the world”