



London Cycling Campaign & NHS Hackney Ark

Cycling project focusing on young people with disabilities

Even though the benefits of activity for physical and mental health are well-known, young people with disabilities continue to be excluded from this. The 'My Active Future' report (2020) found that one-third of disabled children do less than 30 minutes of activity per day, that disabled children's activity levels decrease significantly as they grow up, and that disabled children are twice as likely to be lonely compared to their peers without disabilities.

London Cycling Campaign and the NHS Homerton Healthcare Foundation Trust teamed up to offer young people using the Hackney Ark, a specialist NHS outpatient service for young people with disabilities and additional needs, access to cycling.

Two months on from this five-day intensive cycling course, we caught up with Kwame and Amira, two of the participants.

November 2022

~~~

### **Amira**

I'm eleven and I live in Hackney.

This summer I rode a bike for a week. In primary school I did Bikeability, but this was different as we went to different places. We went to the park, we got drinks at the park – I got a lemonade. My uncle and my dad came and rode bikes too.

I don't really know what I learnt over the week... it was just for fun. We went on the road, but that wasn't really a new thing: I cycled on the road before in primary school. But I learnt how to emergency stop without falling off the bike. They would shout stop, and I would have to stop as quick as possible. It was difficult because I was always falling off and overbalancing.

I guess the cycling week was all the same things I learnt in primary school, but they taught me to memorise it. So it's easier because they taught me it again and now I won't forget it.

Then this September I moved to secondary school. I go to school together with one of my friends a lot of the time, on my bike.

If my mum's working I'll go to my grandma's house, and my friend and me meet up by the alley outside. She'll help me hold my crutch, and then I'll take my bike. She's got a bike as well, but she doesn't usually ride it as her dad hasn't bought her a bike lock yet. So she's walking quite quickly



*Amira with Mike, the London Cycling Campaign Community Cycling Officer and qualified instructor*



and I'm riding quite slowly, and we go to school together. It takes about 10 minutes, 15 minutes, not that long. All we have to do is go straight and then there's a shortcut through the park.

After school my friend goes to football club and netball club. I go to band club – I've got a trombone scholarship. The school's very big and some things are all the way across the school, so they gave me a lift pass, so it's easier and I don't have to go up all those stairs.

But if we're not doing clubs then we'll both go home together with the bike, or if I get picked up instead to go back to my mum's then I leave my bike at school overnight.

I find cycling to school easy. I don't get tired because it's not that far. There's no hills to go up on the way there. And even coming home when there's a hill I just go around a bit instead.

I'm really trying a bit more now I'm in Year 7. I'm doing more stuff, different stuff. I don't have my primary school friends around but I'm finding it easier to get on with the people in my year, and I have more friends now.

I'm enjoying everything about secondary school.

*Pictured below: Amira (centre) on her way to the park*







## Kwame

This summer I did a cycle course for one week.

Mike taught me the basics like brakes, how to handle the bike, and then at the end of the week we rode from here in Hackney Downs to Victoria Park. The ride at the end was good. It was a bit tiring, but I enjoyed it.

The week was exactly what I expected. Cycling again felt strange at the start, but by the end of the week I got used to it. I felt confident cycling.

I haven't been using my bike since the cycle course. I've just been busy. Now I've just started at college. I get the bus there. It's good. Only one of my friends moved to college with me, but I'm enjoying it.

### **Hyacinth, Kwame's Mum, adds:**

*I am really proud of Kwame. Going to college, leaving his school and most of his friends behind – but actually he is enjoying it and the tutor seems really nice as well. It's creative media production, so he's doing filming and photography.*

*I don't think anything would have made the cycling week better. It was a really good course. At the beginning I didn't know exactly what to expect, so maybe a bit more information so people know how good it is – if people don't know what's happening, then they won't sign up, and they're missing out.*

*We found out about the course via email from somebody at Hackney Ark. We signed up for it over a year ago and by the time it came around, I couldn't even remember what it was. And it's a big commitment – every day for five days, out of your summer. So maybe just a leaflet about the cycling course and roughly what they would do for the week would be good, because so many more people should know about it. It's needed.*

*There was nothing about the course we didn't like. It was really good, especially for non-riders, who are maybe a bit scared and just want to learn to ride. I haven't been on a bike for about 15 years, so it was good for me to get back on a bike too.*

