

EAST END WHEELIES

Jagonari Cycles, London



Source: Owen Pearson, Tower Hamlets Wheelers

Where would you rather be...stuck on a bus, squashed between two strangers on a tube, or struggling to keep fit at your local exercise class? Not much of a choice really is it? When Jagonari, a Women's Centre based in Whitechapel in East London, created their new bicycle training course for local Bengali women they wanted to give real choices to the women they worked with - an easy form of transport and an enjoyable way to keep fit. Nurjahan Khatun, Director at Jagonari, tells us more:

Jagonari was already a successful not for profit and charitable organisation. What made it decide to do a cycling project?

The centre is well known for providing training and skills to local women, anything from IT, English or Yoga. But what can be a better skill than learning how to get around on an environmentally friendly mode of transport that also keeps you healthy.

"I was really inspired by an older friend who's a teacher. She wears full Muslim dress but still manages to cycle everywhere. By learning to ride bikes we're bringing down social stereotypes and encouraging other women to take part."

So how did you get women in Whitechapel interested?

The project was launched in March 2005 at Jagonari Centre. It is a well known organisation for local women specifically, women of Bengali descent. Jagonari always ask the women they work with what their needs and interests are, that way we know a project or service is going to be used before we further develop it. For example, we knew from talking the local women that, they wanted female cycle trainers rather than men so we made sure we offered this as part of the project.

Jagonari had the local support.... What then?

Funding was applied for from the local London Cycling Campaign group Tower Hamlets Wheelers. In addition a pool of bright orange Dutch-style bikes were provided by the 'good going' campaign to offer free cycle training to women in the local community.

Bicycles are being provided by the "good going" travel awareness campaign and a local bike shop will be ensuring that the bikes are in top condition and ready for the women to ride. The cycle training is through the London School of Cycling and Youth Action UK. However, it's not only younger women that are taking part but also older women who are actually encouraging the younger ones.

"I studied in Cambridge and all my friends there cycled but, at the time, my parents felt it wasn't safe for me to ride a bike. I regret that now so when this project was first mentioned I was really keen to take part".

What were the highs? And what were the lows?

Yasmin Hussain, Project Administrator, says, "The high point has to be the overwhelming take-up of the course, for Level One (Beginners) and Level Two (Intermediate - Advanced). It's been incredibly successful and it really builds women's confidence. In addition, within three months of setting up Jagonari won the best 'good going' project at Transport for London's Sustainable Transport Awards."

"I guess the lows," says Yasmin, "is the fact that we are **in some ways we could be a victim of our own success, it's so popular with a high demand, we have waiting lists**, so a lot of women have to wait. We really need more funds."

"The Jagonari Cycles! project has been successful in working towards sustainable travel awareness in a community often considered as 'hard to reach' and uses practical demonstration to explore new transport options."

Patrick Allcorn, Transport for London

Popular and successful. ..What's next?

"Well we'll keep delivering an excellent project and of course look for more funding to help with the increased demand.



Source: Jagonari

Facts

- The pros and cons of cycling – cycling is easy (once you know how) and it offers complete freedom. There are lots of benefits – if you're physically able to use a bike. A bike can be used for getting to work, school, the shops and for meeting friends or family. The cons are that bikes can be expensive unless you can borrow one or buy a second hand one. There are also safety risks from other vehicles and potential pollution, but that goes for most forms of transport even walking.
- How to get started – all you need is a bike in good working order (lights and a lock). Try and get some cycling training or get a 'cycle buddy' and before you start have a practice run. Make sure you're confident and safe.
- What else? – make sure your bike is insured, that you it's locked when you leave it, you know the Highway Code and that your cycle is well maintained.

Further Information

- To set up a cycling campaign or group, visit the Cycle Network at www.cyclenetwork.org.uk.
- Use the popular National Cycle Network. It offers 10,000 miles of walking and cycling routes (75% of all people in the UK live with 2 miles of the route). Visit www.sustrans.org.uk.
- If you want to save energy and get financial assistance as an employee or employer by cycling to work (or other forms of energy efficient transport), find out more from the Energy Saving Trust by visiting www.est.org.uk or phone their transport help line on 0845 602 1425.