

Comment & interviews

CYCLE SHORTS

THIS MONTH CYCLING UK'S CAMPAIGNS ROUND-UP, THE WOMEN'S FESTIVAL OF CYCLING, THE BIG BIKE CELEBRATION IN HARROGATE, AND MORE



Photo: David Glover

Julie on a donated bike, with fellow volunteer David Aris

Local Heroes

JULIE HOOPER

Retired physiotherapist **Julie Hooper** is a volunteer with inclusive cycling group Edinburgh ABC (All-ability Bike Centre).

Dan Joyce spoke to her

E DINGBURGH ABC PROMOTES cycling for *anyone* who wants to come along,' Julie Hooper told me. 'We've had children as young as three and a gentlemen who was 95. The majority who come have learning disabilities. Only 14% of people with learning disabilities take exercise even once a week. That's shocking.'

To redress this, activities need to be genuinely inclusive. At its base at Bangholm Outdoor Centre, Edinburgh ABC has a fleet of special bikes, an all-weather hockey pitch to ride them on, and direct access to the city's traffic-free cycle network for led-rides. People who couldn't otherwise cycle now can.

'We've got one mum and son who come

along,' said Julie. 'He's 17 but has special needs. He can't walk but when he's on a side-by-side tandem with his mum, we go for miles on the cycle routes. She gets to do a normal activity with her son, which is brilliant for both of them.'

'David Glover, who runs the group, will always find a way for people to cycle, no matter what their problem. It's trial and error. We often get them on bikes and think, no, they'd be better on that kind of bike. We have a whole range of different footplates we can swap between bikes.'

David was Julie's introduction of Edinburgh ABC. 'I was team leader for a group of neurological physiotherapists working in the

community. David contacted my manager, and I went to try out the bikes with my team. We were amazed. We'd never seen a side-by-side tandem or a wheelchair transporter.'

Special bikes like these are the key to making cycling accessible to everyone. 'We have quite a few people with learning disabilities who don't have any language skills,' said Julie. 'And you just see their faces light up when their support workers are cycling with them, with the wind in their hair. It's fantastic.'

Julie is a keen cyclist herself; her hybrid is her transport around the city. In volunteering with Edinburgh ABC, she gets to apply her professional skills to something she's passionate about. 'I really enjoy it,' she said. 'I look forward to my Tuesdays. We're a cycling community. One of the other volunteers is guy who worked in IT all his life, and he said to me: "I absolutely love this because I'm actually with people and doing something helpful."'

Since she began volunteering, Julie has done a ride leader's course, a first aid course, and the Velotech Mechanics Silver Qualification in bike maintenance, all paid for by Edinburgh ABC. These are skills she uses weekly to help get and keep people cycling – to make positive changes to their lives.

'I still do some work for the health service on the staff bank,' she said. 'The man I was telling you about who was 95, Ron Cattell, I met him at the centre that I work at. He said: "I've got arthritic knees and they've told me that I'm not a good candidate for a knee replacement because I've got a dicky heart. The physios have said they can't do any more for me. I get so depressed."

'I said: "Ron, what did you like doing?"

'He said: "I used to have a bike."

'I said: "I've got just the place for you!"'

For more about Edinburgh ABC, visit [facebook.com/EdinburghABC](https://www.facebook.com/EdinburghABC)
For a video of the late Ron Cattell, see bit.ly/cycle-ronstoppable

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