



GATEWAY WHEELERS

RISE.



This case study looks into Gateway Wheelers, a charity based in Sunderland, who received funding from the Sport England Together Fund.



Gateway Wheelers is a charity, based in Sunderland, that enables people with disabilities to enjoy cycling. It was originally established in 1996 by the father of a child with disabilities who was frustrated by the lack of facilities for his son. The charity currently runs cycling sessions three to four days a week, out of the Old Rectory in Houghton-le-Spring and offers a range of adapted bikes to meet the varied needs of their participants.

We awarded the charity £10,000 from the Together Fund, a £20m continuation of the Tackling Inequalities Fund that was set up in April 2020 as part of the Sport England support package to help the sport and physical activity sector through the coronavirus pandemic, to support the running of their sessions between July and November 2022.



This funded the delivery of 73 sessions, that had a total of 363 attendances from 99 individual participants. The funding was important in strengthening the organisation's financial sustainability, as existing funding had ended prior to the project, which potentially could have forced Gateshead Wheelers to cease their operations.

As described by Gateway Wheelers Project Lead, Sara Bateman, the Together Fund provided short term sustainability and time to pursue other funding options to secure longer term financial sustainability, she said:

“Just before the pandemic we had funding from the National Lottery and literally two days before the first lockdown, that funding was just finishing, without the funding I think as a charity, we would have folded.”

The funding enabled Gateway Wheelers to respond to the COVID pandemic and its aftermath (particularly for groups who are disadvantaged). One of the most significant consequences of the funding was that it allowed Gateway Wheelers to deliver additional sessions to meet the increased demand for their activities that emerged post-COVID.

Sara said: “Once we got out of COVID we started getting inundated with phone calls, as people wanted to get out, so we wanted to start that up again and get everyone active and going again” .

Sara highlighted that this increased demand for disability-friendly cycling activities was, in large part, caused by the particularly significant impact that the COVID pandemic had on the physical and mental health of people with disabilities.





This physical impact was especially clear to see for participants who had been involved with Gateway Wheelers prior to COVID, as their ability to complete laps during the sessions was severely diminished.

The increased demand for these types of activities is highlighted by the fact that, in total, 61 of the 99 project participants were individuals that Gateway Wheelers had not previously worked with before. Part of this new intake was made up of children with disabilities, as the funding allowed Gateway Wheelers to develop their offer to children, a group that had previously been difficult to access due to the timings of sessions.

Funding also contributed to improved organisational knowledge, confidence and capacity, enabling Gateway Wheelers, and Sara in particular, to develop greater experience of working with children.

Overall, the positive impact of this project on participants is demonstrated by several comments below from representatives of organisations whose clients attended the project. The value of the project is perhaps best exemplified by one participant, 'John' (not his real name), who previously cycled around 100 miles a week on his bike.

A heart attack in April 2013 resulted in John having a hypoxic brain injury, as a result of which he is now partially sighted, unable to walk more than short distances, and requires 24/7 care.





John's wife said: "It's massively improved his mood, it's been helping to keep his weight down, it helps to exercise him, to build up his muscle tone, keep his cardiac output as regular as can be and he absolutely loves it. Gateway Wheelers have helped him reconnect to a hobby that he was familiar with, something that he loved prior to his health issues"

Feedback about Gateway Wheelers staff was overwhelmingly positive, with organisations whose clients participated in the sessions praising their flexibility, responsiveness and positivity.

One aspect of the project that was especially important to its participants, was the fact that provision of the sessions was free. Many participants are reliant on benefits for their income and the funding enabled participants to take part free of charge, which was crucial for widening access to those on modest incomes.

Overall, the Gateway Wheelers project illustrates how an organisation can utilise Together Fund funding to support its financial sustainability, to respond to the challenges posed by the Covid pandemic, to widen participation and to engage participants who belong to one of the Fund's priority groups to increase their levels of physical activity.

